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# **Young people's experiences of school and drug use: Systematic review and case-study research**



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Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)  
at the University of London

**July 2008**

## **Abstract**

Drug use is a cause of health and social problems in the UK. Despite widespread interest in 'whole-school' interventions, which make changes to school socio-environmental factors in order to reduce young people's drug use, the evidence-base regarding 'school effects' on drug use had not previously been synthesised, and the basis for these potential effects only partly theorised. This thesis examines whether and how schools as institutions can influence young people's attitudes and actions relating to drug use and generates new theoretical insights regarding the processes through which any school effects on students' drug use may occur.

Experimental/quasi-experimental studies and longitudinal observational studies were systematically reviewed to determine whether school-level factors influence drug use and if so via what mechanisms. Experimental studies suggested that interventions which aim to increase student participation, improve relationships and promote a positive school ethos can reduce drug use. Observational studies consistently reported that disengagement and poor teacher-student relationships were associated with drug use. However, these studies provide few insights regarding the processes through which schools may inhibit or promote drug use, or how this may vary according to socio-demographic factors.

Qualitative data were collected at two case-study schools through semi-structured interviews with students and teachers, and supplemented with observations and documentary evidence, to explore how the school environment might structure drug use and generate new theoretical insights. The case-study research highlights: the connections between education policies, school practices, disengagement and young people's drug use in the UK, particularly the meaning of cannabis use for the most disengaged students as a source of belonging, status and 'escape'; the importance of school social network formation and 'group' identities in determining young people's attitudes and actions relating to drug use; and also, how certain schools may be actively 'hiding' the issue of students' drug use.



## Contents

Abstract	<i>p. 2</i>
Contents	<i>p. 3 – 4</i>
Statement of originality	<i>p. 5</i>
Acknowledgements	<i>p. 6</i>
Abbreviations	<i>p. 7</i>
<b>Chapter 1.</b>	<b>Young people, drug use and the role of school-based health promotion <i>p. 8 – 22</i></b>
<b>Chapter 2.</b>	<b>Theoretical concepts for exploring school influences on young people's drug use <i>p. 23 – 40</i></b>
<b>Chapter 3.</b>	<b>Research questions and methods <i>p. 41 – 56</i></b>
<b>Chapter 4.</b>	<b>School effects on young people's drug use: a systematic review of intervention and observational studies <i>p. 57 – 72</i></b>
<b>Chapter 5.</b>	<b>Park Grove School case-study <i>p. 73 – 109</i></b>
<b>Chapter 6.</b>	<b>Highbridge School case-study <i>p. 110 – 144</i></b>
<b>Chapter 7.</b>	<b>Summary and discussion <i>p. 145 – 164</i></b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<i>p. 165 – 182</i>
<b>Appendices</b>	<i>p.183 – 207</i>
<i>Appendix 1:</i>	<i>Young people's and teachers' socio-demographic characteristics</i>
<i>Appendix 2:</i>	<i>Topic guide for student interviews (autumn term)</i>
<i>Appendix 3:</i>	<i>Topic guide for student interviews (summer term)</i>
<i>Appendix 4:</i>	<i>Topic guide for teacher interviews</i>
<i>Appendix 5:</i>	<i>Student information sheet and consent form</i>
<i>Appendix 6:</i>	<i>Teacher information sheet and consent form</i>
<i>Appendix 7:</i>	<i>Parent/guardian letter, information sheet and consent 'slip'</i>



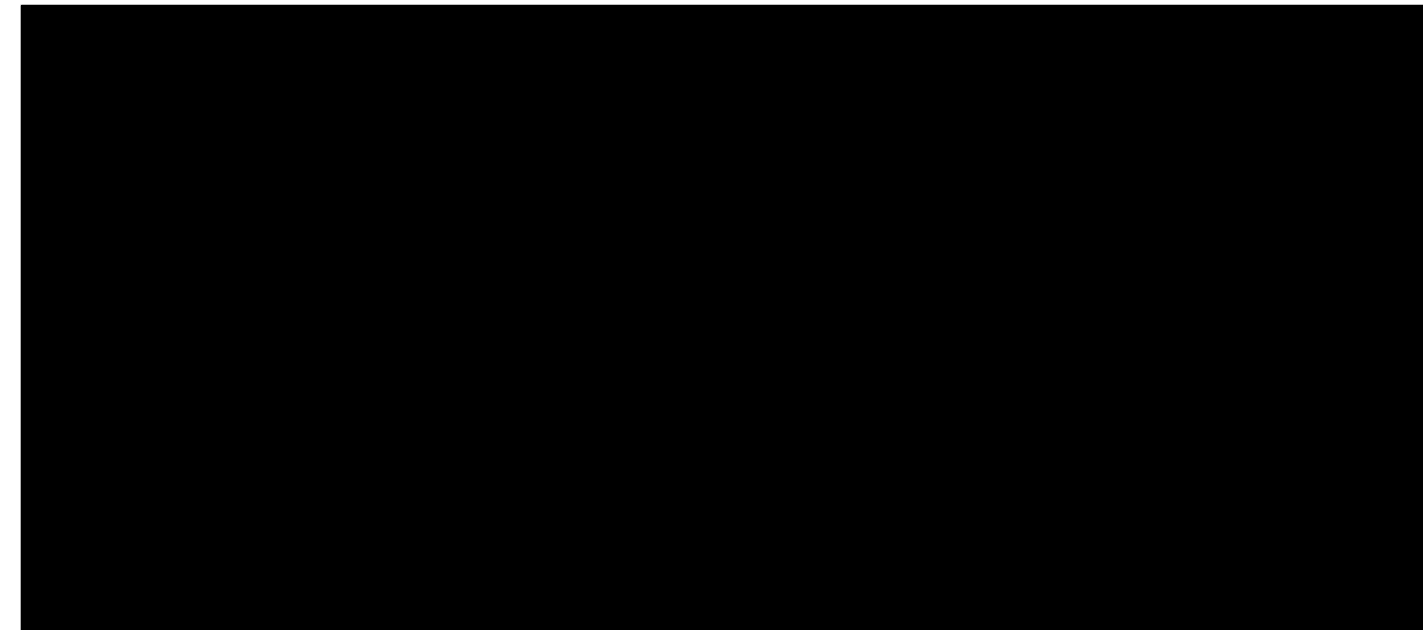
## List of Figures & Tables

Figure 1: Reported drug use in last year by age (NatCen/NFER, 2007)	p. 10
Figure 2: Stages of a systematic review	p. 44
Figure 3: Summaries of interventions studied	p. 58
Figure 4: The Healthy School Ethos project intervention 'core components'	p. 162
Table 1: Summaries of high-quality intervention studies: study design, sample and intervention effects	p. 66 – 69
Table 2: Characteristics and findings of high-quality observational studies	p. 70 – 72

## Statement of originality

*I have read and understood the School's definition of plagiarism and cheating given in the Research Degrees Handbook. I declare that this thesis is my own work, and that I have acknowledged all results and quotations from the published or unpublished work of other people.*

Signed:



Date: July 2008

Full name: **Adam Fletcher**

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## **Abbreviations**

CCCS	Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfEE	Department for Employment and Education
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DH	Department of Health
EMCDDA	The European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction
ENHPS	European Network of Health Promoting Schools
EPPI-Centre	Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Coordinating Centre
ESPAD	The European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs
ISHN	International School Health Network
LEA	Local Education Authority
NatCen	National Centre for Social Research
NFER	National Foundation for Education Research
NHSP	National Healthy Schools Programme
NQT	Newly-qualified teacher
OFSTED	The Office for Standards in Education
ONS	The Office for National Statistics
RCT	Randomised controlled trial
RIPPLE	Randomised controlled trial of peer-led sex education in England
SES	Socio-economic status
STI	Sexually transmitted infection
WHO	World Health Organisation

## **Chapter 1. Young people, drug use and the role of school-based health promotion**

### **Introduction**

This thesis examines whether and how schools as institutions can influence young people's attitudes and actions relating to drug use and generates new theoretical insights regarding the processes through which any school effects on students' drug use may occur.

Its first aim is to synthesise the existing quantitative evidence on school effects on drug use in order to assess whether schools appear to *influence* young people's drug use and by what possible *mechanisms* any such influences might occur. The rationale for this aim is that, despite the considerable policy interest in 'whole-school' interventions to prevent and/or reduce student drug use, the evidence regarding school influences on young people's drug use had not been systematically reviewed and synthesised.

The second aim of the thesis is to explore, from the perspective of young people themselves, how young people experience school, how these experiences vary according to social background, gender, ethnicity and level of engagement, and the processes through which any school effects on young people's attitudes and actions relating to drug use may occur. The rationale for this aim is that the *social processes* through which these potential effects may occur are *under-researched* and *under-theorised* (this is outlined in **Chapter 2**).

This first chapter presents an overview of drug use among young people and the public health importance of this, as well as outlining the centrality of school-based health promotion strategies to address this. The origins of 'whole-school' approaches to health promotion and the current UK policy context are then described. An overview of the structure of the rest of the thesis is presented at the end of this chapter.

### **Young people and drug use: prevalence and socio-demographic patterns**

Youth is frequently portrayed as a period of peak health and physical fitness. The risk posed by diseases during childhood has subsided while degenerative diseases (e.g. cancer) tend to pose minimal threats until later in the life-course. However, it is misleading to portray adolescence as a period free from health risks. At present, potentially harmful behaviours, such as the use of illegal drugs and the illicit use of volatile substances (henceforth together described as 'drug use'), are widespread among young people in the UK. Adolescent drug use increased dramatically during the 1980s and 1990s (Barton, 2003). UK-wide surveys of secondary school students' health-related

behaviours report that between 1987 and 1996 the proportion of 14 and 15 year-olds using illegal drugs increased six-fold: in 1987 only 5% reported having used drugs in the last year compared to 32% in 1996 (Balding, 2000). By the end of the 1990s the UK had the highest prevalence of young drug-users in Europe (EMCDDA, 1998). Although the rate of drug use among young people in Britain has remained relatively constant since the late 1990s (Schools Health Education Unit (SHEU), 2005), in comparison with other European countries the UK continues to far exceed the average in terms of how many young people misuse solvents, smoke cannabis, take ecstasy and use other illegal drugs, such as cocaine and heroin (Hibell et al, 2004; UNICEF, 2007).

A large representative survey of 11-15 year-old children in schools in England in 2006 found that 17% of 11-15 years olds reported using drugs in the last year (NatCen/NFER 2007). As in previous years, cannabis was the most commonly used drug. Ten percent of pupils aged 11-15 had used cannabis in the last year. Five per cent of pupils reported misusing volatile substances in the last year. Four per cent of young people had taken Class A drugs<sup>1</sup> in the last year, a figure which has been stable for over five years. In terms of Class A drugs, young people were more likely to have taken cocaine (2%) and ecstasy (2%) than amphetamines (1%) or heroin (1%). Although schools are a convenient, simple and inexpensive sampling frame, school-based surveys under-represent young people who have low rates of school attendance and young people who have been excluded from school – both of which are groups which are associated with high rates of drug use (Goulden and Sondhi, 2001). There are also practical problems with collecting reliable self-report data about students' use of drugs in school-based surveys (McCambridge and Strang, 2006). Therefore, this survey is likely to *under-estimate* the true rate of drug use among 11-15 year-olds.

Although pre-teenage children aged 10-12 may be in situations where other people are using illegal drugs, relatively few have used drugs themselves (McKeganey et al, 2004; NatCen and NFER, 2007). The recent NatCen/NFER survey cited above found that only 5% of 11 year-olds reported taking drugs in the last year and less than 1% of 11 year olds reported using drugs on either a daily or weekly basis. Volatile substance misuse is more common among 11 and 12 year-olds, possibly because these are easier to obtain (NatCen/NFER, 2007). However, the prevalence and frequency of illegal drug use increases sharply with age during the secondary school years (see **Figure 1**). In the most recent NatCen and NFER survey, by age 15 nearly one in three young people had used drugs in the last year (29%) and more than a quarter had taken drugs in the last month (17%). The European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD) study

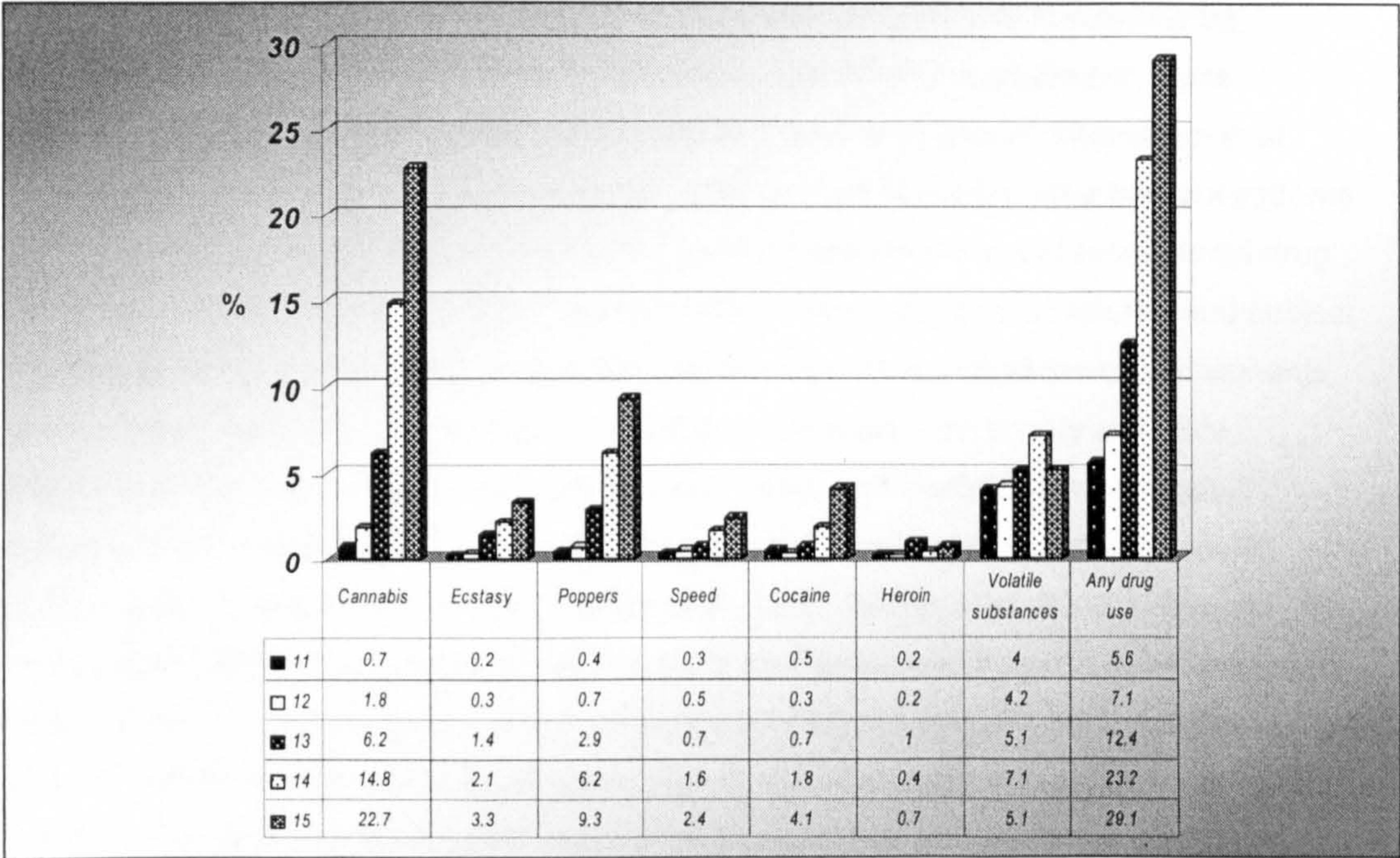
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<sup>1</sup> The Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 divides controlled drugs into three categories according to their harmfulness; Class A drugs are considered to cause the most harm. The following Class A drugs were included on the questionnaire used for this survey: amphetamines when injected, ecstasy, cocaine, crack, heroin, LSD, magic mushrooms and methadone.



carried out in 2003 found similarly high levels of drug use among 15 and 16 year-olds in the UK: 38% had smoked cannabis and 9% had also used other drugs (Hibell et al, 2004). A recent UNICEF survey of young people's well-being in twenty-one industrialized countries found that that the UK was one of only three countries in which over 35% of 15 year-olds had smoked cannabis (UNICEF, 2007).

Figure 1: Reported drug use in last year by age (NatCen/NFER, 2007)



Recent research on youth lifestyles and the social context of drug use has highlighted how drug use has not only increased but also spread widely into all sections of the UK youth population, particularly the use of cannabis (Parker et al, 1998; Barham, 2006). Firstly, the ‘gender gap’ in adolescent drug use has closed and gender is no longer such a significant predictor of drug use that it was before the 1990s in the UK (Leitner et al, 1993; Ramsay et al, 2001; Sweeting and West, 2003; Currie et al, 2004). Since 2004 there have been no significant differences in the proportion of boys and girls who reported taking drugs in the last year (Fuller, 2005; NatCen/NFER, 2006; NatCen/NFER, 2007). Secondly, rates of drug use are increasing among all ethnic groups (Fuller, 2005), although some differences between ethnic groups in terms of reported drug use (as well as drinking and smoking) persist (NatCen/NFER, 2007). Young people of mixed ethnicity are most likely to report drug use whereas Asian young people are least likely (Rodham et al, 2005; NatCen/NFER, 2007). Thirdly, socio-economic status is also now less strongly associated with drug use among secondary school students (NatCen and NFER, 2007). The *North-West Longitudinal Study*, which followed over seven-hundred 14 year-olds for five years during the 1990s, was among the first to suggest that social class was



no longer a significant predictor of, or protector against, drug use in adolescence (Parker et al, 1998).

It has been suggested that these 'record levels' of adolescent drug use, with fewer distinctions by gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status, indicate that drug use is now a 'normal' part of young people's lives (Measham et al, 1994; Parker et al, 1998). According to the 'normalisation' thesis, "while the overall prevalence of drug use varies widely across different regions and samples, drug use nevertheless appears to be spreading into all sections of the youth population, and differences between some population sub-groups are becoming less polarized and more subtle" (Measham et al, 1994 p. 309). The concept of 'normalisation' distinguishes between more harmful patterns of drug use (such as drug dependence) and youthful experimental and recreational drug use, which it suggests is 'transitory', located within mainstream youth cultures and subject to quite rigid norms about what constitutes reasonable and responsible use. Proponents of the 'normalisation' thesis cite data showing that drugs are now widely available, experimentation begins during the early teenage years and 'pathways' into regular, recreational drug use are now 'normal' for young people from a wide range of social backgrounds (Measham et al, 1994; Parker et al, 1998; Parker et al, 2002). However, the normalisation thesis has a tendency to overstate *how prevalent* drug use is among young people in the UK: among young people of secondary school age (11-16) it is still a *minority* activity and the attitudes of young people towards drugs are certainly not unequivocally liberal or permissive, *even among young drug-users* (Shiner and Newburn, 1997).

Furthermore, the concept of normalisation largely ignores how social and economic inequalities continue to be associated with patterns of teenage drug use (MacDonald and Marsh, 2002; Shildrick, 2002). Through relying on surveys of 'life-time reported any use of drugs' normalisation theorists often fail to distinguish adequately between: the different ages at which drug use was initiated; experimental, occasional or regular drug use; and which drugs young people are using. More 'sensitive' analyses of adolescent drug use have found that the most disadvantaged young people *use drugs at an earlier age* (Sweeting and West, 2005), *use drugs most frequently* (The Information Centre and Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2006) and *are more likely to use Class A drugs* (McVie and Norris, 2006; The Information Centre and ONS, 2006). Even the *North-West Longitudinal Study*, which largely informed the concept of normalisation, found that young people who use drugs during their early teenage years are still more likely to come from low-income families (Parker et al, 1998 p. 87). Above all, it is still the most vulnerable and socially excluded groups of young people – such as young people who are not in education or training, homeless young people, young people whose parents misuse drugs and 'looked after' young people – who are most likely to use drugs and whose drug

use is less likely to be 'transitory' and subject to norms of self-control, and more likely to begin at an earlier age, involve heavier use and a wider range of drugs (Lloyd, 1998; Goulden and Sondhi, 2001; Sutherland and Shepherd, 2001; Hammersley et al, 2003; Ward et al, 2003; Wincup et al, 2003; ONS, 2006).

In summary, the theory of 'normalisation' highlights how drug use is now relatively common among young people in the UK, starting at younger age than ever before and subject to norms limiting use. However, it is misleading to generalise that adolescent drug use is in no way associated with socio-economic status, particularly for young people aged under-16, and that normative, cultural barriers limit more problematic drug use. That is to say, *drug use is more 'normal' and more problematic for some groups of young people than others*. In order to reduce the harm associated with drug use it is therefore thought to be more appropriate to have a 'differentiated' understanding of 'normalisation' (South, 1999; Shildrick, 2002; MacDonald and Marsh, 2005). This involves recognising the social and economic, as well as cultural, determinants of adolescent drug use.

### **Young people and drug use: health and other harms**

As drug use has increased and spread more widely into different sections of the youth population, so has the evidence of drug-related harm and public and political concern about the consequences of adolescent drug use. Although the vast majority of this increase in youthful drug use in the UK and its integration into British society has been through the growing use of cannabis and 'club drugs' which are sometimes considered to be 'soft' drugs, these substances still have health risks, especially for frequent users who are most at risk of harm. In 2006, cannabis was the most frequently reported 'main drug of misuse' by under-18s attending drug treatment agencies: in total, 11,582 young people (75 per cent of all clients) received treatment for cannabis misuse in 2005-2006 (National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse (NTA), 2007). Recent studies have found that the potency of samples of cannabis 'skunk' seized by police in the UK have doubled in strength in the last 10 years (Daly, 2007a) and it is thought that these increases in the more potent forms of cannabis may have the most harmful effect among the youngest users because they usually consume in groups and may therefore be less able to regulate their usage according to perceived potency (Legget, 2007).

Cannabis can cause short- and long-term health problems, such as nausea, anxiety, depression and respiratory problems (Hall and Solowij, 1998; MacLeod et al, 2004). Regular cannabis users can become dependent and often report withdrawal symptoms (Hall and Pacula, 2003; Melrose, 2007); young people who start using cannabis at an early age and use cannabis frequently are at the highest risk of becoming dependent (Hall, 2006b).



Cannabis use is also thought to increase the risk of mental health problems, particularly among frequent users (Hall, 2006b). A recent systematic review and meta-analysis of longitudinal, population-based studies found a significantly increased risk of 'any psychotic outcome' among individuals who had ever used cannabis, and these findings were independent of potential confounders and consistent with a 'dose-response effect' (Moore et al, 2007). The authors concluded (p. 327):

*We have described a consistent association between cannabis use and psychotic symptoms, including disabling psychotic disorders. The possibility that this association results from confounding factors or bias cannot be ruled out, and these uncertainties are unlikely to be resolved in the near future. Despite the inevitable uncertainty, policymakers need to provide the public with advice about this widely used drug. We believe that there is now enough evidence to inform people that using cannabis could increase their risk of developing a psychotic illness later in life... cannabis use can be expected to have a substantial effect on psychotic disorders at a population level because exposure to this drug is so common.*

People with serious mental health problems such as schizophrenia are particularly vulnerable to adverse psychiatric consequences because cannabis use can provoke relapse and aggravate existing symptoms (Johns, 2001) although whether cannabis is a cause of schizophrenia continues to be a source of debate (Castle and Murray, 2004; Finkel, 2006). Although more research is needed on the long-term effects of adolescent cannabis use on mental health, frequent use of cannabis at age 14-15 had been found to predict later psychiatric morbidity after adjustment for potential baseline confounders (Patton et al, 2006). In addition to these public health concerns, there are also increasing concerns about the effects of cannabis use on young people's learning. Drawing on longitudinal data from Australia, a recent study found that early initiation of cannabis use is associated with lower rates of education attainment after adjusting for potential confounders (Van Ours and Williams, 2007).

As with cannabis use, the true extent of future mental health problems due to the use of ecstasy is also unclear but ecstasy-users may be at risk of depressive illnesses in later life (Working Party of the Royal College of Psychiatrists and the Royal College of Physicians, 2000). There is also evidence that ecstasy use may also impair cognitive functions relevant to learning (Parrott et al, 1998; Schilt et al, 2007). Dehydration is a more immediate risk for ecstasy-users, which can cause loss of consciousness, coma and even death. One-hundred and seventy-eight ecstasy-related deaths were reported in the UK between 1998 and 2002, mainly among teenagers and young adults (ONS, 2004), and there has been an increase in the numbers of ecstasy-related deaths reported since the mid-1990s (Schifano et al, 2003). Ecstasy-users become tolerant to the psychoactive effects of MDMA and may 'binge' on greater dosages of the drug – a problem which has been linked to the recent peak in ecstasy-related fatalities (Schifano, 2004).

Amphetamine ('speed') use and volatile substance misuse are also associated with

nausea, headaches, long-term psychological effects and the risk of fatality (Emmett and Nice, 2006). Deaths reported due to amphetamine use have increased since the 1990s: 93 deaths were reported in 2002 (ONS, 2004). Between seventy and one-hundred young people also die every year from inhaling volatile substances, some of whom are first time 'glue-sniffers' (Field-Smith, 2003).

A small minority of young people aged 11-16 also use cocaine or heroin (NatCen/NFER, 2007), the drugs which have the greatest potential for dependency and are associated with the highest morbidity and mortality rates and other harms (Drucker, 1999; Edwards, 2005). Although self-reported cocaine use among secondary school students remains relatively low (approximately 2%), a recent *DrugScope* survey of eighty drug and alcohol service providers in Britain suggested that growing numbers of young people are seeking help for cocaine use (Daly, 2007b). There is also evidence of significant increases in cocaine use among 16 to 24 year-olds from the latest British Crime Survey (Murphy and Roe, 2007). This is potentially a significant public health problem because cocaine use can result in serious mental and physical health problems, such as depression, paranoia, and heart and respiratory problems (Emmett and Nice, 2006).

As with cocaine use, in spite of the very low levels of young people reporting heroin use in secondary school surveys each year, a significant number of young people are referred to specialist drug treatment services because of heroin use. For example, in 2006 1,036 (7 per cent) of young people who attended drug treatment services did so due to heroin or other opiate use (NTA, 2007). Dependence on heroin involves a wide range of health risks, including poor nutrition, mental health problems and overdose. In addition, sharing injecting equipment can transmit infections such as HIV and hepatitis B. Furthermore, many young people who are dependent on heroin are also using other drugs at the same time and this poly-drug use increases the risk of overdoses and fatality (Taylor et al, 1996; ONS, 2000). As well as these serious health risks associated with cocaine and heroin use, drug dependence is overwhelmingly concentrated in the most disadvantaged areas and strongly linked to social exclusion, both as a cause and a consequence (Parker et al, 1987; Bourgois, 1995; Gruer et al, 1998; MacDonald and Marsh, 2002; O'Gorman, 2005).

Furthermore, although less than 2% of 11-15 year-olds report using cocaine or heroin while still at school, early initiation and frequent use of cannabis and other drugs at a young age appears to increase young people's vulnerability to the risk of more harmful drug use in the future. Longitudinal observational studies from the USA, Australia and New Zealand have all found that regular cannabis use at ages 14-16 predicts later use of more addictive and harmful drugs, such as heroin or cocaine (Yamaguchi and Kandel, 1984; Lynskey et al, 2003; Ferguson et al, 2006). A systematic review of longitudinal



studies reporting associations between young people's drug use and subsequent harm found consistent associations between cannabis use and increased reported use of other drugs in the future (MacLeod et al, 2004). However, the evidence for the impact of early drug use on later more problematic use is complex, sometimes contradictory and appears to be dependent on the population being studied (MacLeod et al, 2004; Frisher et al, 2007) and the mechanisms through which this progression may occur are unclear and contested (Hall, 2006a). Early initiation of drug use is certainly only one risk factor among many for later experience of drug-related harm and the majority of young people who use cannabis and 'club drugs' do not graduate to 'harder' drugs and more problematic patterns of drug use. Nonetheless, *early initiation of cannabis use does appear to lead to further drug use for some young people.*

Finally, in addition to presenting direct health risks, adolescent drug use is associated with accidental injury, self-harm, suicide (Charlton et al, 1993; Beautrais et al, 1999; Thomas et al, 2007) and other 'problem' behaviours, such as alcohol misuse, unprotected sex, youth offending and anti-social behaviour (Jessor et al, 1991; Home Office, 2002; Jayakody et al, 2005). For example, a recent report by the Independent Advisory Group on Sexual Health and HIV (2007) has suggested that there are strong links between drug use, 'binge' drinking and sexual health risk, citing common trends in these risk behaviours. The authors suggest that the increasing rates of drug and alcohol use, especially among young women, may be partly responsible for 'fuelling the current sexual health crisis', such as the large increases in the incidence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) being diagnosed. Furthermore, although the links between crime and heroin or cocaine dependence are well known, there is increasing evidence of links between teenage cannabis use and youth offending: the recent Home Office 'arrestee survey' of 7,535 offenders found that cannabis was the most widely taken drug in the last month (46%) and this association was greatest for the youngest offenders (Boreham et al, 2006). This is not to say that there is necessarily a direct causal relationship between adolescent drug use and these other health and social problems, however, there is clear evidence that they 'cluster' together among certain groups of young people.

### **The centrality of schools in responses to young people's drug use**

The UK government drugs policy supports a wide range of interventions aimed at reducing the harm caused by drug use, from preventing the supply of drugs and law enforcement to education and social development programmes, as well as treatment and rehabilitation services for dependent users (Home Office, 1998). Although there is five times more public money spent on enforcing the current drug laws than there is on prevention and education (HM Treasury, 2007), two recent government strategies aim to reduce young people's drug use through stronger commitment to investing in drugs



education and early intervention. Firstly, the *Updated National Drug Strategy* aims to 'reduce the harm that drugs cause to society, including communities, individuals and their families' and emphasises the importance of reducing the use of 'hard' drugs (Home Office, 2002). Reducing drug use among young people, particularly vulnerable groups of young people who are most at risk of harm, is a central target of this strategy. Secondly, increasing the number of young people who 'choose not to take drugs' is part of the *Every Child Matters* 'Be Healthy' target (Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2004b). This further strengthens the government's commitment to education, prevention and early interventions.

These two strategies support a wide range of interventions aimed at reducing the harm caused by drug use (DfES, 2005). For example, a 'credible, non-judgemental and reliable' drugs advice and information service for young people and their parents – FRANK – has replaced the National Drugs Helpline to raise awareness about the effects of drug use (Home Office et al, 2006). Targeted programmes aimed at socially disadvantaged and 'excluded' young people and other 'at-risk' groups have also been piloted, including new community-based youth development projects such as the *Positive Futures* programme and the *Young People's Development Programme* (DfES, 2005; Wiggins et al, 2006). In addition, specialist adolescent drug treatment and rehabilitation services have been developed by the Department of Health and the National Treatment Agency to increase the participation of young 'problem' drug users (under 18 years of age) in treatment programmes.

Despite these new developments, *secondary schools continue to be the main focus of drugs prevention efforts*. The DfES (now the Department for Children, Schools and Families) 'drugs guidance' for secondary schools (2004a) clearly sets out the school's role and responsibilities: all schools should have a drugs policy which covers the 'content and organisation' of drugs education and makes provision for the management of drug-related incidents; schools without a drugs policy should develop and implement one 'as a matter of urgency'. In addition to providing information about the risks and effects of drugs, schools are also expected to promote student's confidence and refusal skills and ensure that those for whom drugs are a concern receive appropriate support (DfES, 2004a). In the latest annual NatCen and NFER survey of secondary schools' policies on substance use all of the 290 secondary schools surveyed reported that they taught students about drugs and 96% had written policy on drugs (NatCen and NFER, 2007). However, the proportion of pupils who remembered having lessons on drugs at school (58%) suggests that implementation varies.

This emphasis on providing drugs education and prevention strategies through schools is not confined to the UK. Schools are also recognised as the most important sites for drugs

education and prevention in countries such as the USA and Australia (Evans-Whipp et al, 2004). Nor is it a new approach. Schools have traditionally been recognised as the most important site for drugs education (and substance use prevention more generally). This makes sense for several reasons. Firstly, where education is provided universally, such as in the UK, schools provide access to the vast majority of young people who, in turn, spend a significant amount of time at school. It has been estimated that young people spend around 15,000 hours at school in the industrialised world (Rutter et al, 1979). Secondly, the years young people spend at school are regarded as a formative period in their 'health career' during which health patterns develop (Tones and Tilford, 2001). Thirdly, schools are relatively well-resourced. The largest amount of spending on children and young people is through schools. Also, in terms of human resources, school staff are professionally trained to support young people's learning and development (Brint, 1998). Finally, evidence that health promotion is beneficial in terms of improving students' achievement and behaviour at school has further encouraged schools to provide health education (Healy, 2004).

Although classroom-based drugs education interventions, aiming to improve knowledge, develop skills and modify peer norms, are well-established as standard practice in schools, drugs education interventions' success in changing behaviour is not altogether supported by research evidence. A recent systematic review report of such interventions found that they can have positive effects but concludes that these are small, inconsistent and generally not sustained (Faggiano et al, 2005). In other words, drugs education may be necessary to promote students' 'health literacy' but not sufficient on its own for changing young people's behaviour or reducing drug-related harm. The limited evidence of effectiveness of existing strategies has highlighted the importance of also addressing the wider environmental, social and cultural determinants of young people's drug use. Following the emergence of 'settings-based approaches' to health promotion, traditional classroom-based drugs education programmes, which focus on the individual factors contributing to drug use, have gradually been accompanied by additional strategies in schools which address some of those wider influences on young peoples health.

### **Health promotion in schools: 'settings-based' approaches**

Settings-based approaches to health promotion have their roots in the World Health Organisation's (WHO) *Health for All initiative* and the *Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion* (WHO, 1986). The Ottawa Charter argued that health is influenced by where people 'learn, work, play and love' and integrated new thinking about health promotion and heralded the start of this new approach (Young, 2005). Subsequent WHO initiatives, such as the Jakarta Declaration, have also argued that the social and cultural environment is a vital feature of health promotion: "comprehensive approaches to health

development are the most effective...particular settings offer practical opportunities for the implementation of comprehensive strategies." (WHO, 1997 p. 3). Key principles regarded as necessary to achieve the status of a 'health promoting setting' are: the creation of a healthy environment; integration of health promotion into the daily activities of the setting; and reaching out into the broader community (Baric, 1993). Since the late 1980s, health promotion interventions have been widely established which made changes to institutional 'settings', such as schools, hospitals and prisons (Whitelaw et al, 2001).

The origin of this new 'settings' approach to health promotion in schools is attributed to a WHO conference in 1989 which led to the publication of *The Healthy School* (Young and Williams, 1989). This report was produced by the Scottish Health Education Group on behalf of the WHO. It argued that the *whole life and environment* of a school can become a health promoting force. The report envisaged schools providing not only traditional health education but also improving the school ethos and environment and fostering better relationships between the school, parents and the wider community. Following this report 'whole-school' approaches have received continued support from international networks, such as the WHO, the European Network of Health Promoting Schools (ENHPS) and the International School Health Network (ISHN) (WHO, 1998; McCall et al, 2005). Government policy has also supported whole-school approaches to health promotion in the UK. In *Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation*, the Department of Health reaffirms the importance of schools in promoting health and tackling inequality (DH, 1999). Such work is increasingly regarded as producing dual benefits in terms of contributing to health gain and raising levels of pupil achievement (DfEE, 1999). In 2004, the Government re-confirmed this vision that 'health and education go hand in hand' (DH, 2004). Building on the National Healthy School Standard pilots, *Choosing Health: Making healthier choices easier* outlines a new, statutory framework for healthy schools in England – the National Healthy Schools Programme (NHSP).

The NHSP was introduced in September 2005 in response to concerns about young people's health and well-being (DH and DfES, 2005). If the Ottawa Charter was the beginning of the journey towards settings-based health promotion, and 'whole-school' approaches embody this prevailing philosophy, then the NHSP is intended to operationalise this philosophy in schools in England. The programme – compulsory in all schools by 2009 – requires schools to demonstrate that they have developed positive and supportive environments and encourage participation. In addition to health education, this approach involves evidence of changes to the school setting such as, the management, policies, relationships with parents and communities, environment and culture, staff development and school democracy. One of the aims of the NHSP is to reduce students' drug use. However, it is questionable whether this approach represents a genuine sea-



change in health promotion in schools or rather whether it merely represents a change of 'rhetoric' (Rivers et al, 1999; West, 2006). An evaluation of schools involved in pilots indicated that schools rarely implement structured sets of activities to improve the environment or culture (Warwick et al, 2004). Furthermore, NHSP schools still do not receive detailed guidance on how they should do this. There is also concern that the NHSP is too directive and that the process of monitoring and inspection will mean that schools merely 'tick all the action boxes' required rather than deliver real change to the whole school environment (Noble and Robson, 2005).

Despite the potential limitations of the current policy approach, the current emphasis on school-level changes alongside traditional drugs education activities makes sense in the light of evidence which highlights the importance of the school environment in determining young people's behaviour. A longitudinal study of twelve secondary schools in London by Michael Rutter and his colleagues (1977) was the seminal study of 'school effects' on young people's behaviour. Although it did not assess school effects on health outcomes, this study found that institutional factors varied between schools and differences in pupil's attainment and behaviour between schools were related to specific characteristics of schools *after pupil-level differences were adjusted for*. In particular, it appeared to be the overall school ethos which influenced pupil outcomes; school 'ethos' refers to values and the school culture and, in particular, the extent of student engagement and the quality of relationships in schools. The study concluded (p. 179):

*The total pattern of findings indicates the strong probability that the associations between school process and outcome reflect in part a causal process. In other words, to an appreciable extent children's behaviour and attitudes are shaped and influenced by their experiences at school and, in particular, by the qualities of the school as a social institution.*

Rutter's findings prompted further research to examine if these institutional-level factors also influenced student's health-related behaviours (West, 2006). Although still in its infancy, research into 'school effects' on young people's health suggests that schools vary widely in terms of pupils' health profiles and, with regard to certain health outcomes, this is not explained merely by pupils' individual and family socio-demographic factors nor by neighbourhood effects (Sellstrom and Bremberg, 2006; West, 2006).

Two recent systematic reviews of experimental studies of 'whole-school health promotion interventions', which made changes to schools' organisations, environment and cultures, found that these approaches appear to be 'promising' for reducing a wide range of 'risky' health behaviours among young people (Lister-Sharpe et al, 1999; Mukoma and Flisher, 2004). Furthermore, systematic reviews using both evidence of effectiveness from experimental studies and studies of young people's 'views' concluded that whole-school interventions are a promising approach for promoting healthy eating, physical activity and



other 'positive' behaviours during secondary school (Rees et al, 2001; Shepherd et al, 2001). A systematic review of school-based interventions designed to promote emotional well-being concluded that "the most robustly positive evidence was obtained for programmes that adopted a *whole school approach*" (Wells et al, 2003 p. 221). However, none of these systematic reviews have focussed specifically on how schools may influence and young people's attitudes and actions *in relation to drug use*.

Evidence previously cited specifically in support of school effects on drug use (and school-level changes to reduce students' drug use) has often focussed on large-scale, cross-sectional surveys which found that students' poor school experiences are strongly correlated with risky health behaviours such as drug use. For example, using cross-sectional survey data from ten European countries, Canada and Australia, Nutbeam and colleagues (1993) found a consistent relationship between 'alienation' at secondary school and 'abusive behaviours', such as smoking and drinking, and warned that 'schools can damage your health'. Further analysis of this data suggested that students' perceptions of being treated fairly, school safety and teacher support were related to substance use (Samdal et al, 1998). Research carried out in Australia has also suggested that school disengagement and exclusion are associated with persistent and problematic drug use (Spooner et al, 2000). Although these studies suggest that schools may influence young people's actions relating to drug use and, in turn, cause health and other harms, these individual-level cross-sectional studies do not provide evidence of causality and cannot examine the direction of effects or school-level factors associated with drug use.

Researchers in the UK have also begun to investigate the links between students' school experiences and drug use. Data from a survey of 580 young people aged 11-18 years living in Swansea, Wales indicated that bullying, poor school performance and low school commitment were all associated with drug use (Case and Haines, 2003). A survey of 2,062 10-16 year olds, carried out in North London in 2002, found that young people who thought school was a 'waste of time' were the most likely to be using drugs (Katz et al, 2003). Another cross-sectional study, which surveyed 25,789 students at 166 UK secondary schools, found that schools providing 'value-added education' – a measure of whether schools exceed the level of examination success and attendance that would be expected according to their socio-demographic profile – were associated with lower rates of drug use (Bisset et al, 2007). There is also recent evidence from the UK based on in-depth interviews with young cannabis users that 'disengaged' young people's consumption of cannabis and other drugs may escalate over time as they feel that they can't make the 'transition to higher status roles' (Melrose et al, 2007). A recent Home Office literature review, which drew on these and other studies, concluded that: *there is considerable evidence relating aspects of schooling to adolescent drug use* (Frisher et al,

2007 p. 19). However, once again, this does not amount to robust evidence of *school effects* and provides few insights into the mechanisms through which these effects may occur.

In light of this, the first aim of this study is to synthesise the existing quantitative evidence on school effects on drug use in order to assess whether schools appear to *influence* young people's drug use and by what possible *mechanisms* any such influences might occur. The second aim of the thesis is to explore, from the perspective of young people themselves, how young people experience school, how these experiences vary according to social background, gender, ethnicity and level of engagement, and the processes through which any school effects on young people's attitudes and actions relating to drug use may occur.

### **Thesis aims and structure**

This chapter (**Chapter 1**) has thus presented an overview of drug use among young people, the public health importance of this and current school-based health promotion approaches. Despite the considerable policy interest in 'whole-school' interventions to prevent and/or reduce student drug use, the evidence regarding school influences on young people's drug use had not been systematically reviewed.

**Chapter 2** explores which existing psycho-social and sociological theories and concepts are likely to be appropriate for understanding how schools influence young people's drug use. This chapter identifies key theoretical concepts to inform the case-study research and which form the basis for building new theory about the relationship between young people's experiences at school and drug use. It outlines three psycho-social theories which suggest how schools may determine young people's drug use: social learning theory, social identity theory and attachment theory. However, while they are useful in predicting which individuals may use drugs, such theories provide few insights into how young people's attitudes and actions are structured by institutions and wider social and economic inequalities. In order to assemble a broader conceptual framework this chapter reviews, firstly, sociological theories and empirical studies which have highlighted how people's actions are enabled and constrained by social 'structures' and, secondly, 'late modern' theories of young people's transitions to adulthood and the role of consumption as a marker of identity.

**Chapter 3** sets out the research questions informing both the systematic review and case-study research as well as the design and methods employed in each of these. The results of the systematic review are presented in **Chapter 4**. The review highlights the consistent evidence in favour of school effects on drug use, but finds that the quantitative

studies included in the review provide few insights regarding the *processes* through which schools may inhibit or promote drug use, or how this may vary according to students' socio-demographic factors.

The findings from the qualitative research undertaken at two case-study secondary schools are reported separately in **Chapter 5** and **Chapter 6**. The case-study research provides important new insights regarding the *processes* through which school effects on young people's drug use may occur through highlighting: the connections between education policies, school practices, disengagement and young people's drug use in the UK, particularly the meaning of cannabis use for the most disengaged students as a source of belonging, status and 'escape'; the importance of school social network formation and 'group' identities in determining young people's attitudes and actions relating to drug use; and also, how certain schools may be actively 'hiding' drug use.

Taken together, this research: identifies potential school effects on drug use at a *population-level* (through the findings of the systematic review); highlights the *mechanisms* via which secondary schools may 'structure' young people's drug use (through the findings of the systematic review and case-study research); and, provides further insights regarding the dual role of students' *agency* and institutional and other social *structures*, such as gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status (through the case-study research). **Chapter 7** summarises and synthesises the results of the preceding three empirical chapters in order to build theoretical insights about how young people's actions relating to drug use may be structured in the context of secondary schools, as well as identifying the key implications for policy, practice and further research.



## **Chapter 2. Theoretical concepts for exploring school influences on young people's drug use**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the key theoretical concepts which informed the case-study research questions and design (outlined in Chapter 3), the analysis of the qualitative data (presented in Chapters 5 and 6), and were used to generate new theoretical insights regarding the relationship between young people's experiences at school and drug use (Chapter 7): (1) **the duality of agency and structure**; (2) **institutional 'rules' and 'resources'**; (3) **school disengagement and 'counter-school' cultures**; and (4) **drug use as identity-work**.

This chapter begins by summarising the existing psycho-social literature on the determinants of adolescent drug use and outlines three psycho-social theories which suggest how schools may influence students' drug use: social learning theory, social identity theory and attachment theory. However, while they provide concepts which are useful in predicting which individuals may use drugs, such theories provide few insights into how young people's choices are structured by institutions and wider social and economic inequalities and are thus insufficient to inform this study. In order to explore the *social processes* through which schools may structure young people's attitudes and actions relating to drug use the key psycho-social concepts are situated within a more comprehensive, sociological framework. Sociological theories and empirical studies which have highlighted how people's actions are enabled and constrained by social structures and how institutional 'rules' and 'resources' shape school 'counter-school' cultures are therefore reviewed in this chapter. Finally, this chapter situates these concepts within the context of current UK secondary-education policies and 'late modern' transformations in transitions to adulthood and young people's identity-work.

### **Theories about *individuals* and drug use**

Young people's drug use has a complex aetiology and the search for the one simple causal influence to account for young people's drug use will always fail. Researchers have identified a long and diverse list of risk and protective factors associated with young people's drug use (Hawkins et al, 1992; Spooner et al, 2001; Frisher et al, 2007), and these factors have a differential predictive value through different stages of adolescence (Dillon et al, 2007). A comprehensive review of epidemiological research by David Hawkins and his colleagues (1992) found that predictors of adolescent drug use exist in every psycho-social domain – from young people's dispositions, behavioural skills, attitudes and values, to their family and friends, schools, community and the wider social



environment. However, although we have a relatively clear understanding about which young people are *more likely* to use drugs, there is less certainty about how these factors interact and *cause* some young people to use drugs or why this use sometimes escalates. In short, the many different 'pieces in the puzzle' which are correlated with young people's drug use have made understanding the causes extremely challenging (Petraitis et al, 1995).

Despite this complexity, several theories have been proposed and tested in an attempt to understand why individual young people use drugs and undertake other 'risky' health behaviours. In a review of the aetiological literature, John Petraitis and his colleagues (1995) identified fourteen major theories based on empirical data. These theories echo the wider psycho-social literature on the determinants of health and are split between those which emphasise: *cognitive decision-making* based on the perceived 'costs' and 'benefits'; *social learning* from peers, parents and other role-models; *personal characteristics*, such as self-esteem and social identity; *attachment* to conventional institutions and values; and those that *integrated* some or all of these theories. Theories which refer to peer groups and social institutions – social learning, social identity and attachment theories – have identified *school-related variables* which predict drug use and suggest plausible mechanisms through which schools may influence young people's attitudes and actions in relation to drug use.

Firstly, both Akers' (1977) *Social Learning Theory* and Bandura's (1986) *Social Cognitive Theory* examine the most 'proximal' variables associated with models of cognitive decision-making and draw on empirical evidence to emphasise the importance of role-models, such as close friends, and 'social learning' in determining young people's attitudes and actions relating to drugs. These theories assert that drug use is predicted by young people's immediate 'social networks', such as their school friends, and it is these peer groups which shape young people's expectations about the consequences of drugs use, their normative perceptions and self-efficacy. In their review of existing theories of adolescent substance use, Petraitis et al. (1995) found that social learning theories were supported by empirical evidence from observational studies, particularly in terms of the *predictive value of 'risky' peer groups*.

Secondly, a theory of social identity formed by Henri Tajfel (1978) to understand the social and psychological basis for individual and 'intergroup' identification and explain aspects of group behaviour is also pertinent for understanding how schools may shape young people's health behaviours. Tajfel's theory proposes that we have an inbuilt tendency to categorize ourselves with certain groups to improve our self-esteem, build our identity based on group membership and to maximize positive distinctiveness from other groups (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). The theory of social identity has had

a substantial impact on social psychology and recent studies suggest that the way in which young people form school groups to tell us who they are and make positive distinctions may relate to adolescent substance use. Research from the UK (Michell, 1997; Michell and Amos, 1999) and the USA (Mosbach and Leventhal, 1988; La Greca et al, 2001) suggests that some young people adopt pro-school attitudes and behaviours such as working hard in school, while others engage in various combinations of smoking, drinking and/or drug use to enter or remain within other specific 'crowds' such as 'top girls', 'jocks' or 'burn-outs'.

Thirdly, attachment theory builds on the concepts of social learning and social identity and seeks to explain adolescent drug use through the importance of commitment and 'bonding' to institutions such as school (Petraitis et al, 1995). For instance, the *Social Developmental Model* (Hawkins and Weiss, 1985) asserts that when young people have weak bonds to conventional social institutions, such as their families and schools, they are more likely to interact with other young people who have weak attachments and less likely to resist drugs. An experimental study of the Seattle Social Development project, which is guided theoretically by the *Social Development Model*, provides evidence in support of the importance of school 'bonding' as a protective factor against drug use (Hawkins et al, 1999; Hawkins et al, 2001).

Young people's school friendship group(s), social identity at school and their attachment to school are therefore all likely to be important theoretical concepts for exploring how young people's school experiences may influence their attitudes and actions regarding drug use. However, although these 'variables' have been shown to predict individual actions, they focus on individuals in isolation from wider, underlying economic and social structural locations and school-level institutional factors. The inadequacies of these theories largely reflect the limitations of theories of 'risk behaviour' and drug use more generally, which have also traditionally been focused on analyses of 'individual rationality' and psycho-social concepts rather than situating behaviour within wider influences, such as inequality and the social environment (Rhodes, 1997). For example, they do not explain how factors such as socio-economic status, gender and ethnicity interact in the context of the school social and cultural environment to determine school peer groups and school 'bonding'. Nor do they fully explain how the process of school disengagement, group identity and students' actions relate to each other, or how 'choices' are enabled and constrained by their experiences of school.

These theories and concepts are therefore instructive but *insufficient* to inform this study because they cannot provide a comprehensive framework for considering the *social processes* via which schools may influence young people's drug use and how this varies according to factors such as socio-economic status, gender and ethnicity. While

recognising that people exercise agency, it is critical to look beyond these school-related 'pieces' of psycho-social theories in order to explore how social structures and institutions might shape and constrain health-related behaviours such as drug use. Giddens' concept of 'structuration' reconciles these theoretical dichotomies – agency and structure – and is instructive for understanding that, although young people are actively making their own choices (agency), their actions are enabled and constrained by the wider social context (structures).

### **The importance of social structure**

In *The Constitution of Society*, British social theorist Anthony Giddens (1984) critically reviews, and re-interprets, a wide range of existing theories in order to locate micro-level activities and practices within broader, more stable structures which enable and constrain these individual actions. Although his approach is 'highly eclectic' and it draws from a wide variety of theoretical traditions (Turner, 1986), Giddens' starting point is the limitations of what he sees as two oppositional theoretical stances which have been applied to human behaviour: on the one side, overly-deterministic theories of human behaviour (e.g. structuralism, functionalism theories, etc.); and on the other side, approaches which over-emphasise individual actions and their meanings and largely ignore external and constraining forces (e.g. social interactionism, phenomenology, etc.). This division between individual agency and social determinants has meant that the 'interdependence' of individual actions and social systems is either ignored or misunderstood and has led to continuing opposition between these different positions (Giddens, 1984). For Giddens, social phenomenon and events are *always contingent on human agency*, however, this 'agency' is *enabled* but also *constrained* by wider socio-economic and environmental 'structures' within which people assess and make their choices. In order to emphasise the influence of *both* agency and structure he uses the term *duality of structure*: this is a process whereby social structures make social action possible and, at the same time, social action creates (and reproduces) those very structures. Giddens (1984 p. 203-4) emphasises how:

*Individual actions are shaped by social 'structure', but the structured elements of social systems are the outcomes of human actions. Action and social systems have to be seen as interdependent elements in a duality...Structure is involved in both systems and action but it is reducible to neither of them. Structures, therefore, are both the medium and the outcome of the actions that they organize; they are the means through which actions are made possible, and they are the consequences of these actions.*

The notion of structuration is often explained in an unnecessarily complex way (Scott, 1992), however, it is essentially about 'structures' linking the dual levels of social systems and agency. Within this theoretical approach Giddens' identifies distinctive systems of 'rules' and 'resources' as the central aspects of these structures. That is to say that social



systems come into being through individuals' agency, or as Giddens calls it 'human action', but it is these 'rules' and 'resources' which structure, or 'govern', these social interactions. Having described what he means by structure, Giddens outlines why the construct of *duality of structure* (structuration) is the foundation for "the fundamental recursiveness of social life" (1986 p.4): agency and social structures are in a *relationship* with each other, and it is the repetition of the acts of individual agents, which are both enabled and constrained by the existence of pre-existing social structures, which ultimately produces structures. In other words, actions would be *meaningless* in the absence of prior structures and we are influenced by social systems, traditions, institutions, moral codes, and established ways of doing things; but we all actively shape (and reconstitute) these structures, traditions and codes through our actions.

Giddens' work has been criticised for being highly abstract and structuration is perhaps better considered as a social ontology (rather than a social *theory*) because it defines *what exists in the world* rather than setting out 'one clear hypothesis' about human behaviour (Turner, 1986). It has also been criticised for not sufficiently drawing on empirical data and giving few examples of how structuration can be applied. However, empirical studies in the field of medical sociology and anthropology, although *not explicitly informed* by the concept of structuration, have illustrated how health-related choices and behaviours, such as drug use, are influenced by social circumstances beyond the immediate control of the individual while also acknowledging that structure and agency are mutually constitutive (rather than antagonistic). For example, a well-known study using in-depth qualitative methods to explore the structural influences on health is Hilary Graham's (1987) study of smoking among low-income women – the women in Britain who are most likely to smoke. Although smoking appears to be irrational for low-income mothers because they are spending money on smoking which damages their health and the health of their children, when seen in the context of their everyday lives the choice was comprehensible. Graham found that cigarettes were the one luxury that these women could afford, provided a rare opportunity for some 'adult time' and 'space' from their children and that smoking played an important role in coping with stress and structuring the daily routine of caring and housework. Although women actively choose to smoke, the social gradient in women's smoking can therefore be seen as a product of wider structures of socio-economic inequality and influential in reproducing health inequalities.

Anthropological studies by Philippe Bourgois (1995; 2003) and Lisa Maher (1997) have also provided important theoretical insights into how gender, race, class and poverty interact and shape health-related behaviours. Both these studies were carried out in 'high-crime, low-income' areas of New York, using ethnographic methods to explore the 'drug economy' in those areas. Bourgois' study of 'street culture' and crack-cocaine-users



in Harlem found that drug use was the expression of deep-rooted structural forces such as racial and class inequality. Younger black residents in the 'ghetto' developed their 'way of life' (culture) in response to their marginalisation from mainstream institutions such as school and their restricted opportunities for legitimate work. In turn, their actions helped to reproduce harmful local drug economies. This work has highlighted how social and health inequalities can structure behaviour and in turn reinforce these inequalities. Maher's study focussed on the 'economic lives' of women who used crack cocaine and heroin in Brooklyn. She found that these women's options had been severely limited, not just by drug use, but originally by poverty, racism, violence, and exclusion from the formal labour market and institutions such as school. Although the women she met were 'creative and resistant actors' (rather than passive victims), the broader social structures and the power of external actors (e.g. 'pimps') reproduced the highly disadvantaged status of poor and minority women.

Studies of younger drug-using population have also illustrated how social structures produce (and are reproduced by) individual actions. An ethnography of young people 'hanging-out on the street corners' in the Scottish town of 'Seaview' explored the intersection of social structures, social practices and agency in the production of 'risky' health behaviours (Pavis and Cunningham-Burley, 1999). Drinking and drug use was an 'integral constitutive' part of street-culture for marginalised and alienated young men: it was an important source of status and provided excitement and the chance to 'have a laugh'. However, young people's actions relating to drug and alcohol use *reproduced the marginalisation of these young men from education, work and the local community*. The authors conclude that: "It is necessary to look beyond the actions and behaviours of individuals or even small groups, to the broader socio-economic context in which the young people lived their lives [...] In our study, the importance of structural issues are clear" (p. 593). This study further highlights the limitation of trying to uncover individual 'risk factors' in isolation from the broader socio-cultural context and the authors specifically recommend that future studies of adolescent drug use take account of 'social structuration' (Pavis and Cunningham-Burley, 1999).

These studies exemplify the importance of examining how constraints operate in people's everyday lives and highlight how these can affect some social groups' health disproportionately: it was the social and economic inequality which reproduced the socio-economic gradient of smoking among British women, the destructive crack cocaine 'street culture' in New York and adolescent street-based substance use in Seaview. Therefore, while people are actively making their own decisions about substance use, it is insufficient to study *individual behaviour in isolation from these broader societal influences*. Although these studies do not specifically address how actions emerge in the context of *schools*, Giddens (1984) has drawn extensively on exemplary sociological

studies of secondary schools – especially Paul Willis' work – to illustrate how human actions emerge in the context of institutions which reflect and reproduce aspects of the social organisation of wider society. In other words, schools provide one of the best case-*examples of structuration*: school social structures are not separable either from individual actions or from wider macro-social structures. The notion of the **duality of agency and structure** is therefore instructive, not only in conceptualizing how to look beyond existing theories which pay insufficient attention to how people's actions are enabled and constrained by their social circumstances, but also how **institutional 'rules' and 'resources'** can structure choices, behaviours and school cultures. The following section emphasises the importance of recognising how youth cultures and social practices emerge in the context of institutions.

### **Institutional constraints and 'counter-school' cultures**

Paul Willis' ethnographic study, *Learning to Labour*, provided a vivid account of a school in the West Midlands and the 'lads' working-class 'counter-school' culture. This research provides both an illustration of the analytical value of structuration theory and rich, empirical evidence regarding the social processes through which institutions actively maintain inequalities. Willis described in detail how institutional factors, such as the school environment and pupil-teacher relations, helped to reproduce social agency and inequality. The seeds of social and cultural reproduction lie in the lads' *active* rejection of school and their attachment to working-class culture and physical masculinity. Willis highlights how "social agents are not passive bearers of ideology but active appropriators who reproduce existing structures only through struggle, contestation and partial penetration of these structures" (p. 175). However, although the 'lads' are actively constructing their own identities and attitudes, they are doing so in a highly structured institutional context, which has its own rules, traditions, moral codes, and established ways of doing things and confers meanings on their actions:

*In a simple physical sense school students, and their possible views of the pedagogic situation, are subordinated by the constructed and inferior space they occupy. Sitting in tight linked desks in front of the larger teacher's desk. Deprived of private space themselves but outside nervously knocking the forbidden staff room door or the headmasters door with its foreign rolling country beyond; surrounded by locked-up or out-of-bounds rooms, gyms and equipment cupboards; cleared out of school at break with no quarter given even in the toilets; told to walk... All these things help to determine a certain organisation to the physical environment and behind that to a certain kind of social organisation. They speak to the whole position of the student. (p. 67)*

These working-class lads' choices, such as 'havin' a laff' rather than get a qualification, were made in the context of, and in opposition to, such a highly constraining institution. Opposition to school was expressed mainly as a 'style' and is lived out in "countless small ways which are special to the social institution, instantly recognised by the teachers, and

an almost naturalistic part of the daily fabric of life for the kids" (Willis, 1977 p. 12). In particular, the lads differentiate themselves from middle-class 'white-collar' culture represented by their teachers and more academic schoolmates (the ear'oles). In part as a consequence of these actions, the pupils reproduced wider cultural and social divisions at school and in their subsequent career and life trajectories. In other words, because they actively choose not to work hard at school and identify themselves with working-class, manual activities they end up with very limited options in later life compared to the ear'oles. Willis' analysis of the physical environment and social context of schools helped to explain how 'working-class kids get working-class jobs'. While the 'lads' rejection of qualifications and refusal to conform at school allowed them to gain some measure of control over their lives, in particular how they spend their time at school, there are contradictions built into these actions and cultural forms which reproduce existing social divisions. For instance, by dismissing academic work traditional class-based divisions between manual and 'mental' labour are further entrenched. The way the 'lads' degrade women also reaffirms the sexual division of labour.

As a member of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at Birmingham University in the 1970s, Willis' study of the lads' cultural resources and resistance to school contributed to a wider body of work on distinctive *youth subcultures* via concepts such as: 'resistance through rituals', 'symbolic warfare' and 'winning space' (Hall and Jefferson, 1976; Hebdige, 1979). Willis' notion of counter-culture refers specifically to those youth subcultures whose values and behavioural norms run *counter* to dominant institutional values and norms. Although criticized for simplifying the resistance/conformity dichotomy and under-estimating the plurality of different cultural responses among working-class pupils (Brown, 1987), Willis illustrates not only how 'counter-school' identities and actions emerge within the context of secondary schools, with their constraining institutional features and practices, but also how schools themselves reflect and reproduce aspects of wider social organisation.

The dynamics of class, gender and the school institution were also found to 'force' working-class girls into an equally contradictory cultural position and reproduce gender, as well as socio-economic, inequality. Angela McRobbie (1978), another member of the CCCS at Birmingham University in the 1970s, found that the concepts utilised by Willis to understand the lads culture – the centrality of class, the importance of school, work and the family – were also instructive for understanding the culture of working-class girls. Drawing on interviews and informal discussions with eighty girls at a youth club in the Maypole area of south Birmingham, McRobbie described how working-class girls were aware that they were expected to look forward to a 'feminine career' in the home. Pushed to the periphery at school by male dominance, these girls formed intense relationships



and, exercising agency in culturally creative ways, were hostile to school and differentiated themselves from the middle-class girls at schools:

*One way in which girls combat the class-based and oppressive features of school is to assert their 'femaleness', to introduce into the classroom their sexuality and their physical maturity in such a way as to force the teachers to take notice. A class instinct then finds its expression as the level of jettisoning the official ideology for girls in the school (neatness, diligence, appliance, femininity, passivity, etc.) and replacing it with a more feminine, even sexual, one. Thus the girls took great pleasure in wearing make-up to school, spent vast amounts of time discussing boyfriends in loud voices in class and used these interests to disrupt the class. (p. 104)*

As McRobbie puts it, these girls 'exposed' the school system for what it was: a waste of time. Like the lads, their cultural resources and responses were partly (but not mechanistically) determined by their social position and gender but they also embodied sets of meanings and practices in response to the school environment that were relatively autonomous. Just like Willis' 'lads', these cultural forms gave the girls power and more freedom in school but, at the same time they 'failed themselves' and, ultimately, reinforced existing material conditions. In other words, although trying to ignore the realities of marriage, housework and child-rearing their feminine anti-school culture was reinforcing class and gender-based inequalities based on their 'feminine careers'.

These seminal studies of the 'lived culture' of schools were important in going beyond overly-deterministic structural explanations of how schools reproduced social inequality which did not take sufficient account of human agency (e.g. Bowles and Gintis, 1976). Twenty-five years after the publication of *Learning to Labour*, Dolby and Dimitriadis (2004 p. 2) concluded that: "Willis' work precipitated a massive shift in the way that researchers have come to understand the school as a site of political, social and cultural struggle, and the way that youth's identities are constructed within schools, ground largely in their own particular autonomy". Although this work does *not* specifically refer to young people's health-related behaviours and the reproduction of health inequalities the concepts of ***school disengagement and 'counter-school' cultures*** – whereby groups of disengaged, anti-school students adopt particular identities and styles – have been important in informing this study. In addition to the notion of structuration based on generative 'rules' and 'resources', the notion of 'counter-school' cultures is instructive for situating the concepts of social learning, social identity and attachment in a broader sociological framework to underpin the case-study research and build new theory. Furthermore, more recent studies have suggested that the role of secondary schools in the reproduction of inequality has not diminished – and may have *intensified* – following UK secondary-education reforms. The following section outlines market-orientated changes to institutional 'rules', particularly current school practices relating to

assessment, streaming and discipline, which further highlight the importance of this theoretical framework.

### **The effects of market-orientated education reforms on 'counter-school' cultures**

Several recent studies have re-affirmed how young people's actions and identities continue to emerge in the context of modern British secondary schools, and that market-orientated reforms to the UK secondary school system – such as a growth in assessment, high-stakes exams, 'league tables' and increased inspection regimes – appear to have *"further underwritten education as a source of differentiation between young people"* (Mizen, 2004 p. 43). For instance, an ethnographic study of a mixed-sex secondary school in a working-class inner-city area of the Midlands in the 1990s (in many ways updating Willis's original study) found that 'macho lads' continue to respond to the school context by inverting the values of the system (Mac an Ghaill, 1994). These 'lads' adopt the three F's – 'fighting, fucking and football' – rather than the three R's – reading, writing and arithmetic – because, like Willis' 'lads', they associate academic achievement with 'posh dickhead achievers' and femininity. Like Willis, Martin Mac an Ghaill concluded that these groups of 'macho lads' anti-school actions were in response to the school hierarchy where academic failure via competitive grades, streaming and forms of authority 'force' differentiation.

Shereen Benjamin (2002) has also highlighted how students are forced to make sense of themselves and construct their identity in response to this 'performance' and 'standards' culture. Her ethnographic study in an inner-city all-girls school found that students with special educational needs (SEN) do their 'identity-work' within a school system that places them outside the dominant versions of 'success' and therefore have to use their identity as a 'resource' to construct alternative, locally produced versions of 'success'. Benjamin describes this identity-work as a version of "politics-in-action": the ongoing process of performing, contesting, reproducing and reconfiguring power relations in contexts contingent on prevailing micro-political conditions, but not necessarily determined by them" (p. 12). Academically excluded students have to become either: 'sweet little girls' who are 'support junkies'; 'big bad girls' who actively resist academic work and refuse support; or 'lazy girls' who can portray their problems as if they are due to a lack of effort. Benjamin had extremely privileged access to the school in her study because she worked there as a part-time learning support teacher and this work updates the work of Willis and McRobbie by providing an up-to-date, empirical account of how the cultural and social construction of meaning and style are embedded in the current school system.

Drawing on these studies (and others) to discuss the role of schools in determining working-class identities thirty-years after *Learning to Labour* was first published, Madeline Arnot (2004 p. 32) concludes that evidence from recent studies suggests that:

*Reforms of schooling from the late 1980s... exacerbated rather than reduced school resistance, by increasing the emphasis on performance and competition within and between schools, and by raising the stakes in terms of compliance to a school culture that was class-orientated, schools were more rather than less likely to be viewed as 'hostile institutions', especially because the sorting and selecting functions of school were made more visible.*

Recent, in-depth research by David Gillborn and Deborah Youdell (2000) in two secondary schools in London also suggests that current policies have *strengthened* the role of the school environment in shaping and constraining young people's actions and reproducing existing inequalities. Gillborn and Youdell suggest that inequalities based on class and race are 'generated, institutionalised and extended' at a *school-level*. In particular, the 'A-C economy' of schools – whereby 'every aspect of schooling' is re-evaluated based on its contribution to the 'headline' statistic of the percentage of pupils which achieves five 'good' GCSEs (A\*-C) – does not value poor, working-class and ethnic minority students as commodities in this economy. This "obsessive concern with a narrow range of elite, measurable 'standards' published in performance tables" is experienced by many students as de-motivating and disempowering (p. 12) and may have further entrenched the importance of *school structures*. Gillborn and Youdell conclude that race- and class-based divisions continue to be actively produced in schools:

*Successive selection strategies in schools apply to pupils (both formally and informally) as they move through their secondary education. These are practices that schools perform on pupils. Pupils do not passively receive these actions; they interpret, question and, on occasion, resist. Nevertheless, the scope for resistance is severely constrained, and pupils are clearly positioned as the subject of numerous organizational and disciplinary discourses in which the young people themselves play little active role. (p. 194)*

A recent ethnographic study of *Disconnected Youth* carried out in 'East Kelby', Teesside, North-East England by Robert MacDonald and Jane Marsh (2005) draws further attention to the continuing presence of 'counter-school' identities and actions in British secondary schools. The study collected data through participant observations and qualitative, semi-structured interviews with young people (N=88), and professionals who worked with young people (N=40), in "one of the poorest, most deprived neighbourhoods in one of the poorest towns in Britain" (p.2). Reflecting on these young peoples' school-biographies they concluded that: "Perhaps the most striking thing about their accounts was their similarity to numerous descriptions of working-class educational disengagement that have been published over the past three decades [by Paul Willis, Martin Mac an Ghail]



and others] despite reforms of the education system that have been attempted" (p. 50). MacDonald and Marsh found that "oppositional cultures were widespread and held a powerful claim over the social identities developed by young people in and towards school" (p. 55). In other words, young people from poor neighbourhoods continue to 'orientate themselves' and act in relation to 'exclusionary' institutional features and practices at British secondary schools (MacDonald and Marsh, 2005). For many of these young people 'fitting in' at school still meant 'having a laugh' and being part of a 'crew', which ultimately reproduced social disadvantage and exclusion. In short, institutional 'rules' and young people's cultural 'resources' continue to structure behaviour and reproduce wider patterns of inequality.

Furthermore, through focussing on how young people 'carve out transitions to adulthood', the 'East Kelby' study highlights not only how modern educational practices appear to have further entrenched disengagement and anti-school attitudes among certain groups of young people, but also how wider social and economic changes have forced these young people to create new identities and styles in place of class-based cultural responses: "In 1974 the 'lads' were stepping from school into manual, working class jobs, over the next two decades the movement of the young working class into jobs after school virtually ceased altogether" (MacDonald and Marsh, 2005 p. 77). In other words, these young people have much less (if any) certainty about their 'transitions' compared to Willis's lads. MacDonald and Marsh suggest that the set of values and practices that stand against the ethos and expected behaviours of formal education now revolve around actions based on 'the street corner', drug use and criminal behaviour as young people are now 'disconnected' from traditional class-based values and cultural tastes. Although they acknowledge that their case-study – 'East Kelby' – is an example of social exclusion *in extremis*, this study forms part of a large and growing body of research on the consequences of macro-level social and economic change on youth transitions:

*To describe the consequences of these changes for young people, sociologists have variously conjured with notions of 'long', 'broken', 'extended', 'protracted', 'uneasy' and 'fractured' transitions to describe the resultant extension of the youth phase. Young people now experience longer periods of dependency on parents and have delayed access to the identities and activities which were previously signifying adult status (e.g. earning a wage, leaving the parental home, the establishment of long-term partnerships, parenthood). (p.32)*

In summary, although secondary schools continue to powerfully shape and constrain young people's actions, the findings of earlier studies in which young people were prepared to enter dead-end manual jobs and tolerate the prospects of unequal relationships (Willis, 1977; McRobbie, 1978) appear to be less relevant today. It is no longer possible to identify those class-based anti-school cultures, such as those described by Paul Willis, as a result of changes in school-to-work careers. As a result of

greater overall affluence, consumerism and changes to youth transitions in 'late modernity' young people's identities are now considered to be more 'reflexive', individualised and increasingly based on their patterns of consumption and lifestyles (rather than social class). The subsequent section outlines these changes to young people's 'resources' for identity-work, particularly the increasing importance of *drug use as identity-work*.

### **Youth transitions, identities and lifestyles in 'late modernity'**

Re-visiting the issue of youth culture since his seminal study of working-class 'counter-school' groups, Paul Willis (1990; 2003) has described how traditional work-based collective social categories have broken down as a result of technological change, 'cultural modernization' and consumerism. As he puts it, there is no longer such a sense of 'clearly allocated places' and a class-based 'shared value system'. Within the context of greater diversity and uncertainty, it is therefore necessary to not only conceptualise how individual actions and identities continue to emerge in the context of *modern* secondary schools but also how young people use new mechanisms and markers of identity which have developed as a consequence of economic, social and cultural *modernisation*, particularly the growing importance of identity-work based on their patterns on consumption and individual lifestyles.

'Late modern' theorists, such as Anthony Giddens, Zygmunt Bauman and Ulrich Beck, have all described how many of the traditional class-based social divisions and institutions associated with Western societies have weakened in the UK and elsewhere as a result of changes in production brought about by globalisation and technological innovation. Giddens (1990) has suggested that a period of late modernity has replaced traditional, more rigid class-systems and this is associated with a completely new set of risks, constraints and opportunities. Beck (1992) has also highlighted new risks, which are a consequence of globalisation and modernization, and how society is now organised in response to these risks. Bauman (2000) refers to this process in terms of a shift from 'solid to liquid modernity'. Individuals have, to some extent, been set free from the constraints of the 'old order'. However, despite this transformation, these theorists do *not* suggest that structural locations such as socio-economic status, gender and ethnicity have ceased to affect life chances: opportunities and risks are still unequally distributed in late modernity. As Beck (1992, p. 35) neatly puts it, "wealth accumulates at the top, risks at the bottom". Giddens (1992) also emphasises that modernity continues to produce 'difference, exclusion and marginality'. It is, in this sense, a cultural transformation as much as a structural one in countries such as the UK.

Andy Furlong and Fred Cartmel (1997; 2007) have discussed the value of late modern theory specifically in relation to 'youth transitions'. They analysed a wide range of data sources and official statistics to examine the changes in patterns of dependence, family life, education, youth employment and leisure which have occurred since the 1970s. Furlong and Cartmel concluded that changes to industrial societies through labour market restructuring, the increasing demand for an educated labour force and social policies that have extended periods of dependency have meant that 'growing up' is now marked by increased 'hesitancy' and 'imprecision'. Previously clearly-defined stages of the life course, with attendant pathways and cultural forms, which marked the passage into adulthood, such as the end of education, entering work and leaving the parental home, have become much more *vague and gradual*. Young people must now "negotiate a set of risks which were largely unknown to their parents...irrespective of social background or gender" (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997 p. 1). However, this is *not* to say that this greater diversity in pathways and possibilities following labour market 'modernisation' has diminished the influence of social class and inequality. Like Giddens (1990) and Beck (1992), Furlong and Cartmel emphasise that transitions to adulthood are *most uncertain and most 'risky'* for young people from the lowest socio-economic groups.

These transformations have not only undermined the 'modern' work-based class system but, in turn, have also disrupted work-based solidarity and *identity*, including in secondary schools. Within this context of greater uncertainty adolescents' identity-formation has become more complex and 'self-created' (Giddens, 1992; Bauman, 2004). For instance, the traditional (re)sources of cultural meaning and identity associated with the 'lads', based on the solidity and predictability of the working-class 'shop floor' culture, have been displaced by greater uncertainty and therefore young people must rely on alternative markers of belonging and new 'resources' to create their biographies and 'sense of self'. Furthermore, as the influence of kinship, tradition and community norms have diminished in late modern societies (i.e. societies where modernity is well developed), people are forced to *reflexively* construct and organise their own biographies. In other words, questions such as 'who am I?' and 'who can I be?' are continually being answered in the day-to-day reality of modern society. In his book of interviews on the 'problem of identity', Zygmunt Bauman (2004 p.45-50) highlights how belonging and identity can no longer be based on a pre-established model of social class since we have moved from a 'solid' to a more 'fluid' (late) phase of modernity:

*Once modernity replaced premodern estates with classes, identities became tasks which individuals had to perform through their biographies... When it comes to class membership, one needs to prove by one's deeds, by one's 'whole life' – not just by brandishing a birth certificate – that one indeed belongs to the class one claims to belong to. By failing to supply such convincing proof one can lose class assignment, become déclassé.*

*For the great part of the modern era it was crystal clear what such proof should consist of. Each class, we may say, had its career tracks, its*



*trajectory unambiguously laid out, signposted all along the way and punctuated with milestones permitting the wanderers to monitor their progress...One could follow the trajectory step by step, acquiring successive class insignia in their proper, 'natural' order, without worrying that the signpost might be moved or turned round the other way before the journey was completed...*

*The shifting of responsibilities for choice onto individual shoulders, the dismantling of signposts and the removal of milestones, topped up by a growing indifference of the powers-on-high to the nature of the choices made and to their feasibility, [are the] trends present in the 'challenge of self-identification'.*

As class and community have weakened as sources of identification, young people have drawn on their patterns *consumption* in response to what Bauman (2004) describes as the 'late modern challenge of self-identification', and this has been a key theme of recent scholarship on youth cultures (Hodkinson, 2007). Although the CCCS's seminal work on youth subcultures made connections between the emergence of new consumer markets and distinctive youth subcultures, such as teds, punks and skinheads, the youth consumer market was only credited with the provision of raw materials which were symbolically transformed through a process of collective resistance (Clarke et al, 1976; Hebdige, 1979). The relevance of these subcultural studies endures in terms of their emphasis on collective labelling and group classification practices (Hodkinson, 2007) and in highlighting the role of the media in the construction of youth cultures (Thornton, 1995). However, the commercialisation, greater individualisation and expansion of 'spectacular' youth cultures beyond a minority of young people contrasts with these earlier studies which emphasised socio-economic position in explaining young people's cultural responses *above all else* (Muggleton, 2000; Shildrick 2006).

In *Youth Lifestyles in a Changing World*, Steven Miles (2000) has used this notion of greater 'individualisation' and the attendant 'challenge of self-identification' to outline how *consumer lifestyles* have replaced class-centred youth cultures as the basis for the formation and articulation of identity (Miles, 2000). According to Miles, it is these consumer-based lifestyles which now provide the 'symbolic resources' through which identities are constructed and through which young people can attain a 'sense of difference', such as from that which is ascribed to them by institutions such as school. As such, young people now call upon their consumption and lifestyles as a resource and space in which to cope actively and creatively with the 'uncertainties' and 'everyday struggles' (Miles, 2000). Lifestyles can thus be seen as a *functional response* to modernity and an active expression of young people's relationship with the 'social world'. Furthermore, the concepts of 'consumption' and 'lifestyle' emerge through the dialectical relationship between structure and agency discussed earlier. Drawing on the idea of social structuration, Steven Miles (2000 p. 14) explains: "young people are indeed barometers of social change, but they do not simply reflect such change; they actively and consciously partake in it".

However, although young people's identities have become more reflexive and increasingly based on their patterns of consumption (rather than social class, as traditional divisions in the labour market have weakened and transitions to adulthood have become more complex and protracted), this is *not* to say that young people are no longer doing their identity-work collectively. It is the 'common cultures' themselves which have changed: if the 'lads' were *proto-workers* who identified with the common culture of their local factory and working-class 'estates' then young people are now more likely to be connected in *proto-communities*, whose shared styles and fashions are based on their lifestyles and 'common consuming interests' (Willis, 1977; Willis, 1990). Even more crucially, this process of greater 'individualisation' *does not mean that* young people's identities are never stratified by social or economic position. This is an 'epistemological fallacy' (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997). This is an 'epistemological fallacy' (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997). Young people are no more *free* to construct their own identities or lifestyles than they ever were.

Therefore, as it has become more difficult to identify clear, pre-determined 'roles' for oneself based on class and/or community belonging, consumption and youth lifestyles appear to have become much stronger markers of identity and adulthood; at the same time, these patterns of consumption and lifestyle 'choices' continue to be *shaped* by social structures. Sheila Henderson and her colleagues (2007) followed over one-hundred young people in Britain, from a diverse range of backgrounds, over a ten-year period in their study of young people's transitions to adulthood. They suggest that 'chemical cultures' are one such "alternative resource for constructing identity, a sense of competence, status and belonging" (Henderson et al, 2007 p.77). However, at the same time, they also emphasise that greater individualisation does not equate to the absence of inequality, rather that it is being remade in *new* forms:

*We are moving from a society in which identities and behaviours were clearly mapped and collectively understood (if not always followed) to one where multiple maps, few agreed routes and high levels of anxiety about whether individuals are 'doing the right thing'. Although gender, ethnicity and social class may no longer operate as a shared point of reference for navigation, they continue to be important in shaping young people's lives and chances. Despite the appearance of meritocracy, research suggests that there is less social mobility than a generation ago... Old forms of inequality such as class, gender and race are being made in new ways. (p. 24)*

Several other recent studies have also suggested that drug use may be central to these 'new ways' in which young people are doing their identity-work and defining themselves (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Miles, 2000; Measham, 2002; MacDonald and Marsh, 2005). For instance, it has been argued that 'risk-behaviours', such as drug use, may be an attempt to feel adult in an increasingly uncertain *risk society* (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997).

In their ethnographic study of school-to-work transitions in 'East Kelby', MacDonald and Marsh (2005 p. 67) suggested that distinctive patterns of drug use may even have become the 'central axis' by which young people differentiate themselves in low-income and socially-disadvantaged communities. Therefore, the concept of *identity-work* is likely to be highly appropriate for exploring how young people's drug use relates to their experiences of secondary school.

### Learning to take drugs?

In summary, young people today are clearly *not* growing up within exactly the same social, cultural and institutional context as the 'lads' that Willis studied however, although they do not focus on drug use specifically, recent sociological studies of secondary schools highlight how 'counter-school' groups continue to form in schools. That is to say, young people's identities and actions continue to be shaped – but not simplistically determined – by the school environment and this process continues to be mediated by young people's socio-economic status, gender and ethnicity. To paraphrase Giddens' concept of 'structuration' and apply it to schools: *school life and young people's development is more than random individual acts; at the same time, it would be oversimplifying the process to state that it is entirely determined by rigid social forces*. As such, psycho-social concepts such as students' school peer groups, social identity and school 'attachment' – which are likely to be *predictive* of adolescent drug use – are best seen in this historical, political and social context rather than in isolation. For example, we need to understand how low 'attachment' is structured by institutional 'rules', school cultures and young people's styles.

Furthermore, as transitions from school to adulthood have radically altered, becoming more complex, protracted and self-created, a new range of meanings, identities and behavioural choices have been created and adopted by young people based largely on their *patterns of consumption* and their lifestyles as they seek to define themselves and clarify their progression to adulthood in 'late modernity'. Drug use is one such form of consumption through which young people self-create their identities. However, although structural locations, such as social class, have become less useful as an obvious source of belonging and identity, they continue to be an important constraint and individuals do not simply *freely* choose who and what they want to be. In other words, the process of 'inventing' ourselves in modern times is therefore likely to be a process through which only the *appearance* of greater choice, control and opportunity has been created (Henderson et al, 2007). As the old anti-school responses are replaced with new ones, could drug use now be as an important biographical reference point for certain groups of young people as 'havin' a laff' and entering the shop-floor was in the past?



In order to explore and understand the relationship between school experiences and young people's drug use the following are considered to be key concepts: (1) **the duality of agency and structure**; (2) **institutional 'rules' and 'resources'**; (3) **school disengagement and 'counter-school' cultures**; and (4) **drug use as Identity-work**. The school case-studies provided an opportunity to draw on these concepts and consider how the school environment interacts with wider social structures and shapes young people's attitudes and actions in relation to drug use. The following chapter describes the case-study research aims and methods (alongside the systematic review's aims and methods), which were informed by this theoretical backdrop.

## Chapter 3. Research questions and methods

### Introduction

A key feature of this study is the use of *both* quantitative and qualitative data – the former in the systematic review of experimental and observational studies, the latter collected through case-study research in two secondary schools in London. This chapter begins by explaining the rationale for the ‘mixed methods’ used in this study and how this relates to my epistemological position. The research questions, design and methods for both the systematic review and the case-study research are then described in detail in this chapter. The ‘role of the researcher’ in the collection and analysis of the qualitative data, and the ethical considerations involved in undertaking the case-study research, are discussed at the end of this chapter.

### ‘Mixed methods’ research: a critical realist perspective

In *Approaches to Social Enquiry*, Norman Blaikie (1993) critically reviews a wide range of ‘paradigmatic disputes’ within the philosophy of science and their relevance to the social sciences. He suggests that the key disputes have involved questioning what kind of science *social science* is, whether the methods of the natural sciences are amenable for the social sciences and whether knowledge of a social ‘reality’ can be obtained. The answers given to these questions, and philosophies underpinning them, have often been divergent and the issues of objectivity and validity in social science have, in turn, been debated by the proponents of different ‘classical’ epistemological positions: on the one hand, the ‘logic’ of positivism proposes that there are ‘truths’ to be known about the natural *and* social worlds, regularities which make up an independently existing ‘social world’ can be discovered and explained, and the ‘truth’ can be validly established; on the other hand, perspectives such as negativism, interpretivism and hermeneutics have rejected this position and denied that this ‘objectivity’ is possible or that ‘validity’ can be independently established.

While I do not agree with the positivist position – that social uniformities are the result of the same process that produce regularities in physical and biological sciences and that we can know *absolute social truths* – neither do I believe that our knowledge of the ‘social world’ has *no objective reality*. As such, this study is informed by a *critical* but *realist* epistemological perspective which asserts that while social phenomena cannot always be studied in *exactly the same way* as ‘natural’ objects (because they are qualitatively different) they can be studied *scientifically* as ‘social’ objects (Bhaskar, 1975; 1979). That is to say, while the methods of the natural and social sciences share common principles, in particular theory building and empirical examination to identify casual explanations,

*their procedures and how they conceptualise objectivity and validity will sometimes have to differ because of differences in the subject matter* (Bhaskar, 1979). The *critical realist* perspective acknowledges that our knowledge of the 'social world' is limited by the fact that the key concepts *are social constructions rather than physical objects* (e.g. inequality) and thus cannot be observed directly, only through the concepts, theories and methods we choose to use (and to change those would then change what appears to be reality). In short, it is a 'contemporary' approach to the philosophy of science which maintains that an objectively knowable reality exists but also acknowledges the role of *interpretation* (Blaikie, 1993).

As a 'realist' I believe that the role of social science is to explore, test and explain observed phenomena with reference to underlying structures and mechanisms but acknowledge the difference between the *empirical*, the *actual* and the *real* 'social worlds' (Bhaskar, 1975). According to this perspective, the empirical domain involves events which can be observed, the actual domain involves events whether or not they are observed and the real domain consists of the *structures and mechanisms* which produce these events. This thesis therefore uses empirical data to generate theoretical insights and build 'models' of structures and mechanisms which, if they did exist in the 'actual' and 'real' domains and operated in the theorised way, would account for the phenomena being examined. Furthermore, in sociological interpretations the relationship between these domains is *interactive* because these empirical models both build on 'lay' interpretations of actual and real events while social scientific concepts also inform and reproduce these interpretations of the 'real' world – a process described by Giddens (1987) as the 'double hermeneutic'.

While some responses to the 'classical paradigmatic disputes' discussed by Blaikie – such as, positivism and interpretivism – have viewed quantitative and qualitative research as having distinctive and divergent epistemological positions, critical realism does *not* insist on an 'identity of methods': "Quite simply, a confusion of 'method as logic of justification' with method as 'how-to-do-it' has allowed people to draw, even if only implicitly, an erroneous conclusion" (Smith and Heshusius, 1986 p. 5). In other words, the difference between these two traditions should largely be seen as 'technical' rather than 'epistemological': *both quantitative and qualitative data about the 'social world' involve interpretation*. As Alan Bryman has outlined (2004 p. 506), although it is true that quantitative and qualitative traditions represent distinctive approaches to social research and certain epistemological positions have *influenced* the character of these approaches:

*This is not to say that quantitative and qualitative research are forever rooted to their original epistemological positions. Instead the two approaches to research can have and do have an independence from their epistemological beginnings. As general approaches to social research, each has its own strengths and weaknesses as an approach to the conduct of social research.*



*It is these strengths and weaknesses that lie behind the rationale for integrating them.*

In short, researchers of a realist orientation claim compatibility. They are thus not prohibited from using both quantitative and qualitative procedures different research methods as these are considered to be appropriate for answering *different types of research questions*. Quantitative data is best able to provide relatively 'crude' information based on a large, representative sample and to examine questions of prevalence and association; while qualitative data is best able to provide highly-valid information based on a smaller, and therefore potentially unrepresentative sample, and to explore questions of meaning and social processes. *Both* quantitative and qualitative methods are necessary to consider questions about the social-structural determinants of health and causality but they do so via different means: quantitative studies can examine the size and independence of associations, as well as the direction of effects; qualitative studies can explore the plausibility of causal pathways. It is the distinctiveness of quantitative and qualitative methods which makes it so attractive to combine them and, taken together, they can provide a more comprehensive 'picture' of social structures and process (Bryman, 2004).

The methods used in this study are therefore designed to *complement* each other based on their strengths and weaknesses. The systematic review draws on longitudinal studies and synthesises the quantitative evidence base to examine possible 'school effects' on young people's drug use. This makes it possible to assess *temporality* and *statistical association* although this only provides relatively crude indications of possible causal processes. This is probably an inevitable limitation given the difficulty of examining extended, complex chains and cycles of causation merely via complex interventions and multivariate quantitative research with attendant problems of statistical power and measurement error. The qualitative case-study research – informed by both the findings of the systematic review and the theoretical concepts outlined in Chapter 2 – seeks to reduce this 'black box' problem associated with these study designs (Green and Tones, 1999). Qualitative data were collected to explore *in-depth* how young people's school experiences, especially school disengagement, may shape young people's perceptions and actions regarding drug use, and to examine how students and teachers *interpret* their experiences and actions the *meanings* which they give to phenomena.

This approach is commonly used and has been described by Jennifer Mason (2006 p.3) as "mixing methods for a close-up illustration of a bigger picture" in her typology of mixed methods strategies. Through the 'subjective stories of individuals' the case-studies therefore help to make sense of the 'bigger picture' and understand contextual variations (Lippper, 2003). As Catherine Hakim (2000 p. 36) puts it, qualitative data *complements the 'birds eye view' with the 'worm's eye view'* and allows us to understand how people

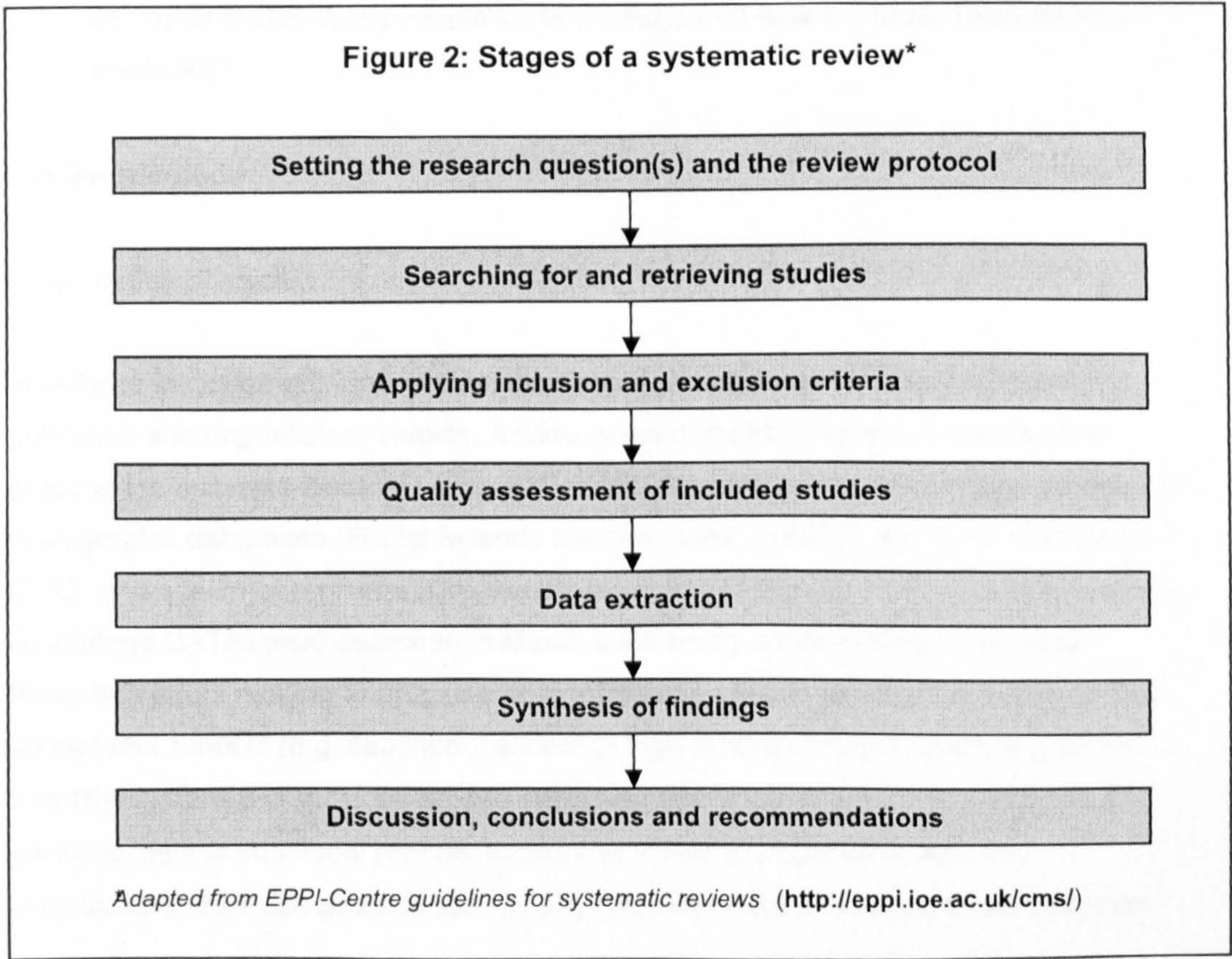


respond to these “external realities at the micro-level”. That is to say, the qualitative case-study component allowed me to get a different perspective (from the systematic review) – paying closer attention to young people’s experiences and own perspectives – and to build theory. Despite the strengths of this approach, there are also potential limitations associated with this mixed methods research strategy: different research methods rarely corroborate straightforwardly and an emphasis on the quantitative research informing qualitative data collection and analysis may prevent the qualitative data *challenging* pre-conceived concepts and limit the emergence of *new themes* (Mason, 2006).

The research questions and methods for each of these two study components are now outlined.

**Systematic review**

A systematic review follows standard methods and stages to identify and synthesise the findings of primary research and answer a particular research question, taking steps to reduce bias at all stages of the review (see **Figure 2**). The review process is designed to be *transparent about its aims and methods* and to ensure that it is *replicable* (Gough and Elbourne, 2002). By quality-assessing and synthesising the results of multiple ‘single’ studies systematic reviews are considered to be a highly-appropriate ‘mechanism’ for testing hypotheses (Petticrew and Roberts, 2005).





## ***Aims and research questions***

This systematic review examined the hypothesis that the way in which schools are institutionally organised influences young people's use of drugs. The aim was to synthesise the existing high-quality research evidence in order to assess whether schools appear to *influence* young people's drug use and by what possible *mechanisms* any such influences might occur. Two types of studies were examined: experimental/quasi-experimental studies of the effects of 'whole-school' drug prevention interventions on drug-use outcomes; and longitudinal observational studies of either whole-school exposures or individual-level school-related exposures on drug-use outcomes. Although studies examining individual-level exposures cannot be used to assess the effects of institutional-level factors on drug use they were included in order to explore potential causal pathways.

The research questions for this review were:

- What effects do whole-school drug prevention interventions have on young people's attitudes to and use of drugs, through which mechanisms and in which contexts?
- Which factors related to school-level organisation, the school environment and young people's individual-level school-related attitudes and behaviours are associated with young people's use of drugs, and how are these relationships mediated?

## ***Review methods***

### ***Identification of studies***

In order to minimise publication bias, the search strategy was designed to identify published and unpublished studies. A wide range of multidisciplinary sources were searched to minimise discipline bias. Keywords, titles and abstracts in major commercial bibliographic databases (Social Science Citation Index, PubMed, Embase, PsycINFO, ERIC) and specialist registers (Cochrane Library, C2-SPECTR, EPPI-Centre Bibliomap, Drugscope DATA) were searched in March 2006 using appropriate free-text and thesaurus terms relating to drug use (e.g. substance misuse or drug prevention or risk taking) and schools (e.g. secondary school or high school or health promoting school). The bibliographies of included studies were also searched and authors contacted and asked to identify additional reports. In order to minimise publication bias, key investigators were contacted to identify any 'grey literature' missed by these searches



and to identify forthcoming publications currently in press. There were no restrictions according to the language or publication date of study reports.

### *Selection of studies*

Examining the effects of interventions that modify school-level factors on drug use is one way of exploring whether and how the institutional organisation of schools impact on drug use. Experimental and quasi-experimental intervention studies were included to address the first research question, not so much to identify 'what works' but because these are the most reliable available source of evidence about *causation*. To avoid confounding by time-related variables and inter-group baseline differences, only the findings of outcome evaluations employing an appropriate comparison group with adequate control of confounders were included in this review. Observational studies which examined school-level effects over time were included to answer the second research question. Although these are more vulnerable to bias and confounding, it was felt that these may nonetheless provide evidence about a wider range of school-related exposures, many of which might not have been studied using experimental designs. Longitudinal observational studies examining the effects of individual-level measures of school-related attitudes and behaviours on drug use were also reviewed to explore the second research question, not to draw conclusions about school-level effects, but because they might provide evidence about the possible mechanisms by which school-level effects bring about individual health-behaviour outcomes. Cross-sectional studies were not included because these cannot provide evidence about temporality and therefore are particularly poor guides to causation.

Different criteria for inclusion and quality assessment were used to screen these different study types (described below).

Intervention studies were eligible for inclusion if they:

- employed an appropriate comparison group and included longitudinal data;
- studied 'whole-school' interventions, which went beyond individual-focused, classroom-based drugs education and involved changes to schools' overall organisation, policies, working practices, culture or environment (Lister-Sharp et al, 1999), and aimed to reduce drug use among young people in the age range 11-16; and
- measured drug use at follow-up.

To be considered of 'high quality', studies were required to minimize problems arising from confounding and bias. Age, sex and socio-economic status (SES) were considered to be the major potential confounders (e.g. Steer, 2000; Sutherland and Shepherd, 2001;

Johnston et al, 2002; NatCen and NFER, 2006). To minimize confounding, an intervention study had either to: allocate schools to intervention/comparison arms randomly; restrict or match the intervention and comparison groups according to the major potential confounders; or adjust for major potential confounders in the analysis. In order to avoid selection bias, attrition rates should not have differed significantly by treatment groups according to age, sex or SES.

Observational studies were eligible for inclusion if they:

- used a longitudinal design to measure the *temporal relationship* between exposure and subsequent outcomes;
- reported one or more exposures which was a measure of either school-level factors or individual-level school-related attitudes or behaviours; and
- measured drug use at follow-up.

To be considered of 'high quality', studies were required to minimise problems arising from confounding via adjustment or restriction. Age, sex and SES were again considered to be the major potential confounders. Observational studies were *not* quality-assessed according to any differential attrition rates because observational studies rarely report attrition by exposure category.

#### *Data extraction and data analysis*

A standardised framework was used by two independent reviewers (Adam Fletcher and Chris Bonell) to assess the quality of included studies and to extract data from 'high-quality' studies. There was no disagreement between these reviewers although on two occasions a third reviewer was consulted where the methods and/or findings reported were unclear (James Hargreaves). Data on outcomes were extracted for the latest period of follow-up reported where multiple reports were published. In the case of both intervention and observational studies neither the outcomes related to drug use nor the interventions and exposures themselves were sufficiently homogenous to undertake statistical meta-analysis and therefore the findings are synthesised narratively. In addition to outcomes related to the primary outcome of interest (drug use), data were also extracted about smoking, drinking and other 'problem' behaviours (e.g. truancy) because these behaviours 'cluster' together (Jessor et al, 1991; Duncan et al, 1999). Effect sizes and indicators of statistical significance or precision are given where these were reported.

#### **Case-study research**

Although they vary in their *methods* and *depth*, case-studies involve studying a phenomenon within its 'real-life' context and provide a structured way of collecting and

analysing data from multiple sources (Yin, 2003). Although they can be used to collect quantitative and/or qualitative data, case-studies have often drawn predominantly on *qualitative* social science research methods in areas such as social policy and public health in order to generate new theoretical insights and hypotheses (Green and Thorogood, 2004). Although critical/realist research eschews positivism's assumptions about the production of laws of behaviour in the 'social world', both approaches aim to produce findings that have relevance *beyond the immediate context of the study* (Wainwright, 1997). Through the process of detailed description of the content and context of a case-study the findings can be 'translated' to other examples which match it closely (Yin, 2003). Furthermore, despite the greater emphasis on flexibility, the qualitative case-study research – like the systematic review – addresses *clearly formulated questions* and involves *explicit, systematic and reproducible* methods (Murphy et al, 1998; Spencer et al, 2003).

### ***Aims and research questions***

As outlined earlier in this chapter, the qualitative case-study research was designed to *complement* the systematic review of quantitative evidence. The aim, partly shaped by the findings of the systematic reviews (see Chapter 4) was to explore, from the perspective of young people themselves, how young people experience school, how these experiences vary according to social background, gender, ethnicity and level of engagement, and the processes through which any school effects on young people's attitudes and actions relating to drug use may occur.

The collection and analysis of the qualitative data was guided by the following research questions:

- How do students describe their experiences of secondary school, school policies and practices, and the overall school culture? How do these accounts vary between students regarded by teachers as more or less engaged with school?
- How do students describe: (1) their 'identity'; and (2) their attitudes and actions in relation to drug use? How do these accounts differ between students?
- What connections (if any) do young people make between their experience of school, their identity-work and their attitudes to and actions concerning drug use?
- What other inter-connections are apparent between school policies, practices and ethos and young people's attitudes, experiences, identities and actions as these relate to drug use?



## ***Sampling methods***

### ***Recruitment of schools***

The research was carried out in two mixed-sex state secondary schools: Park Grove School in outer London and Highbridge School in inner London (pseudonyms). Although they cannot be considered to be representative of schools overall, these case-study schools were *purposively* chosen because (based on their most recent Ofsted *Inspection Reports*) they differed according to (1) their 'ethos', (2) levels of students' engagement and (3) levels of involvement in extra-curricular activities – all of which were 'exposures' which the systematic review suggested could influence young people's drug use (see Chapter 4). These schools also encompass some variation in factors which are likely to influence overall rates of drug use: socio-economic status, ethnicity profiles and overall levels of attainment (Fuller, 2005; NatCen and NFER, 2006; Bisset et al, 2007). These schools' characteristics and 'intake' are described in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6, when the findings from the case-study research are reported.

### ***Recruitment of participants***

Teachers in each school were asked to nominate fifteen Year 10 pupils (age 14-15) for participation in the study<sup>2</sup>, and that these should vary by gender, ethnicity and perceived attitude to school. The socio-demographic characteristics of the young people who participated in this study can be found in the appendix (see Appendix 1).

At both schools, teachers were specifically asked to ensure their nominations included approximately ten students who were considered to be 'disengaged' from school. These students were purposively sampled in order to try and include some students who adopted 'counter-school' cultural identities, styles and actions and thus build on existing theories of schooling. Furthermore, the findings of the systematic review suggested that disengagement is a key individual-level exposure associated with drug use. Teachers were instructed to consider students to be disengaged if they met one, or both, of the following criteria: (1) they had a high-level of unauthorised absences; or (2) they had been excluded from school, either temporarily from the case-study school or permanently from a previous secondary school. If any students were asked why they had been recruited to the study *at no point were they 'labelled' as disengaged*. All the young people who participated in the study were told that: *a range of students* had been selected including students who had relatively low rates of attendance, students who had been

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<sup>2</sup> At Highbridge School one student who was nominated to take part in study left the school before the start of the data collection and was not replaced.

excluded and students who were considered to have 'strong opinions' about their school and how it could be improved.

In addition to these disengaged/less engaged students, the remaining students were identified at random. This made it possible to explore the experiences of a wider range of students and compare and contrast the views of students based on their level of apparent engagement with school. In addition, this further reduced any chance of *stigma* associated with participating in the research.

In each school five teachers were also recruited to take part in this study. They were purposively recruited so as to include teachers with different levels of experience and/or seniority in order to gain a range of different insights. At both schools, the teachers who participated ranged from newly-qualified teachers (NQTs) to members of the school senior management team (SMT) (see Appendix 1).

### ***Data collection methods***

Data was collected during the school year 2006-2007. Multiple methods of data collection were used: (1) semi-structured interviews with young people; (2) semi-structured interviews with teachers; and (3) 'supplementary' data collection through informal observations and documentary evidence about the institutions being studied.

For all semi-structured interviews a 'topic guide' (sometimes called an 'interview schedule') was used in order to *cover the same ground with different respondents*. However, the topic guide was covered in a *flexible way* in order to allow individual's views, experiences, beliefs and accounts of their actions to emerge in their own words and so as not to lose part of 'their story' (Green and Thorogood, 2004). As Lofland and Lofland (1995 p. 85) put it: "a guide is not a tightly structured set of questions to be asked verbatim... Rather, *it is a list of things to be sure to ask about when talking to the person being interviewed*". Because unanticipated lines of discussion can be pursued they describe semi-structured interviews as 'guided conversations' (Lofland and Lofland, 1995). The topic guides employed open-ended questions to produce more in-depth and valid responses, and prompts and probes were used to encourage respondents to expand on what they had said and to seek clarification.

#### ***Semi-structured interviews with young people***

Two 'waves' of interviews with young people took place. Firstly, all young people who participated in the study (N=29) were interviewed in the autumn term (September-December 2006). Interview guides were 'structured' to collect information about: students'

backgrounds; their experiences and views about schools, including information about their friends and their attitudes about 'life after school'; and, their own and others' attitudes and actions relating to smoking, drinking and drug use (see Appendix 2 for the topic guide). Secondly, where feasible, young people (N=21) were interviewed again in the summer term (April-July 2007) in order to gain further insights into their experiences, identify 'critical moments' in their evolving biographies (Henderson *et al*, 2007) and explore how their attitudes and actions changed over time. The coding and analysis of the first 'wave' of interviews with young people was used to inform the topic guide for the second 'wave' of student interviews in the summer term (see Appendix 3).

Individual interviews were used because these are the safest environment to explore issues such as problems at school and drug use. For instance, a study of teenage lifestyles that used focus groups found that, although group discussions were useful for understanding mutual experiences and identities, individual in-depth interviews were needed to explore experiences such as bullying and victimisation at school because young people were reluctant to speak openly about these feelings in front of groups of people with whom they have on-going contact (Michell, 1999). Interviews were carried out face-to-face in private meeting rooms on the school site. They normally lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and took place during the school-day. All interviews were recorded using an audio-recorder, stored electronically and transcribed in full.

#### *Semi-structured interviews with teachers*

Teachers were interviewed only once, towards the end of the school year (summer term 2007) to understand the school and its students from their perspective. The aim of these interviews was to explore teachers': perceptions of the school environment and the school's priorities; working practices; and their views about how students experience secondary school, and how this may relate to drug use. Topic guides were also produced for these interviews (see Appendix 4). Teachers were interviewed individually (rather than in groups) in order for them to feel comfortable discussing potentially sensitive issues, such as cases of 'bad practice' and any criticisms of the school's culture, policies and management. Interviews were carried out face-to-face in private meeting rooms on the school site. They normally lasted approximately 60 minutes and took place during the school-day. Interviews were recorded using an audio-recorder, stored electronically and transcribed in full.

#### *Supplementary data: informal observations and documentary data sources*

In their guide to *Analyzing Social Settings*, John and Lyn Lofland (1995 p. 71) advise that "conscientious naturalistic investigators" should be aware of "the value of a wide range of



supplementary information that may come their way". In order to put students and teachers 'stories' into perspective, and to gain further insights into the social, cultural and policy context of the case-study schools, informal observations were recorded and documentary evidence was collected. Alongside the data collected through semi-structured interviews, this data also informs the findings of the case-study research.

*Informal observations.* Approximately 15-20 days were spent in each school during the fieldwork and this provided the opportunity to observe the school environment informally. These observations were recorded in a fieldwork diary. In addition to students' and teachers' accounts of their school and how it was experienced, 'visual data' provides further contextual and cultural insights (Rhodes and Fitzgerald, 2006). Particular attention was paid to: student tastes and styles, the ways in which groups of students related to each other and to 'outsiders'; the physical spaces different 'groups' occupy at school; and the spaces occupied by students who were 'excluded' from their classroom. Although this did not amount to a systematized recording of interactions, the intention was 'to gather the overtones of cultural circumstance' (Collier and Collier, 2004) and to contextualise students and teachers accounts.

*Documentary data sources.* Additional, 'objective' background data, such as school census data, national policy documents and Ofsted reports, were collected and have been used to describe the social and policy context of the case-study schools (in Chapters 5 and 6), and to understand the policy framework within which these schools were operating. School-specific documents, such as policies on attendance and school discipline and school newsletters, were collected and used to describe and understand the *local context* and to explore any possible differences between policy and practice, and how these differences arose.

### ***Data analysis methods***

The data was used to develop theory about how institutional factors and school experiences might structure attitudes and actions related to drug use and how this varies according to young people's social background, gender, ethnicity and engagement at school. In keeping with a critical realist epistemology, the data has been analysed using an 'interpretative' approach to studying people and social actions (Lofland and Lofland, 1995; Green and Thorogood, 2004). This approach focuses on the *interpretations* people make about their beliefs and actions (Green and Thorogood, 2004) and recognises that these interpretations are not a straight-forward 'picture' of actual and real events. The concepts and meanings used by these 'social actors' are therefore drawn on in the analysis of the data and to build theory. All data are transcribed in full, read and re-read. Data collection and analysis was an 'iterative process' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) and

techniques associated with *thematic content analysis* and *grounded theory* have been used to analyse the data.

Firstly, the transcripts from the first 'wave' of student interviews were *coded* to identify recurrent themes and patterns relating to the research questions in terms of their views, experiences and the accounts of their actions. The aim of this *initial* phase was to organise participants' responses in groups and to identify and explore examples of: agency and structure; institutional 'rules' and 'resources'; disengagement and 'counter-school' cultures; and students' identity-work (the theoretical concepts outlined in the previous chapter). In general, this initial data analysis focused on more 'open'/descriptive coding and *in-vivo* coding based on the *words of respondents* (e.g. describing groups of young people and the 'codes' they use to describe *themselves and their friends at school* ). To facilitate building theory, 'memos' were also used to record initial hypotheses and any inter-connections between the themes emerging from transcripts and the data collected through informal observations and documentary data sources. A framework based on these 'codes' and 'memos' was presented and discussed at an advisory group meeting.

Subsequent interview 'topic guides' were informed by these initial analyses. Key themes which emerged from the first 'wave' of data collection (autumn term) and thus informed the 'topics' covered in subsequent interviews with students and teachers in the summer term were: the issues of school safety; the importance of schools 'groups'/social networks; the 'point' of school; and students 'plans' for the future. Although initial observations and documentary data sources did not inform the sampling methods, initial observations of the schools' social and physical environments and the information derived from school policies and newsletters also informed these 'topic guides' for subsequent interviews. For example, based on my observations, students' experiences of school disciplinary procedures and the use of school 'spaces' were explored; the descriptions of school policies and practices relating to discipline, assessment and extra-curricular provision found in school-policy documents and parental newsletters also informed subsequent interviews.

As before, the transcripts from the second 'wave' of student interview were then *coded* to identify recurrent themes and patterns relating to the research questions in terms of their views, experiences and the accounts of their actions. Further 'codes' were added to the initial framework and 'memos' were once again used to record initial hypotheses and any inter-connections between the themes emerging from the transcripts and the data collected through informal observations and documentary data sources.

*Further* and *final* analyses of both 'waves' of data collection focused on more detailed/'closed' coding to move from merely summarising and describing the data

towards an analysis of the *meaning* of, and *relationships between*, these initial categories (e.g. the *structure*, *identity* and *actions* of students/groups, and the relationships between different /groups). In the tradition of grounded theory, close attention was paid to making 'constant comparisons' and studying 'deviant cases' to 'challenge' the analysis and develop further theoretical insights (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This is to say, close attention was paid to students whose experiences and actions appeared to be the exception (rather than the norm) in order to build theory. However, although I have applied some of the *techniques* of grounded theory, I have *not* engaged in a grounded-theory study because sampling, data-collection methods and data analysis were framed by existing theories. In addition to students' transcripts, I drew on the data collected through interviews with teachers, observations and documentary evidence to *cross examine* – and make comparisons with – students' accounts, and to provide an *alternative perspective* of 'school life'. Teachers' accounts and observational data were also analysed to 'map' out a more comprehensive picture of the social ecology of schools and understand school 'crowds' and the spaces they occupied. This process of 'triangulating' data from multiple sources is appropriate in case-study research (Yin, 2003), can increase confidence in the 'validity' of qualitative results (Green and Thorogood, 2004) and is in keeping with the critical realist perspective described above.

### ***The role of the researcher***

It is of critical importance to be 'reflexive' and examine the 'role of the researcher' when collecting, analysing and reporting qualitative data (Lofland and Lofland, 1995; Silverman, 1997; Bryman, 1999; Green and Thorogood, 2004). *Reflexivity* in sociology is concerned with understanding the difference between what sociologists 'want to do' and what they 'actually do' in the world (Gouldner, 1972). As discussed earlier in this chapter, a critical realist perspective acknowledges the role of *interpretation*. Furthermore, the process of data collection is itself a real 'school experience' as well a 'window' to other 'actual' and 'real' experiences as they are *interpreted* by the interviewee. The interview also has its own 'rules', largely decided by the researcher: in this case, the aim was to make the interview as informal and non-judgemental as possible to encourage students and teachers to 'open-up' and describe not only their school experiences and critical events but also *how they identified themselves at school*. I thus recognise that young people (and teachers) are actively doing their identity-work in the interviews and this is illustrated when the case-study data are reported in Chapters 5 and 6. Young people were keen to portray themselves to me (as well as their peers) as 'hyper girls' 'football lads' or 'indie kids', or as 'safe' or 'sweet' at school. On reflection, the students are likely to have been influenced not only by my methods and interest in their school and drug use but also my age, gender, social class, ethnicity and other personal factors. For example, my age (26) was almost certainly an advantage for engaging and communicating with some of the



students who appeared to see the interview process as a safe space to explain their dislike of 'old man' teachers, explain the meaning of their drug use in terms of the current 'scenes' in London, and in doing so undertake some *further identity-work*. However, my age – and lack of teaching experience – probably *reduced* my credibility with senior and experienced teachers, although as a middle-class graduate student there was often a common ground between myself and the teachers in terms of 'where we were coming from' (a theme which emerged from the students accounts of their backgrounds). Where there was often the *least common ground* was in the interviews with some anti-school/anti-authority black and dual-heritage students who were reluctant to talk at length about their drug use – possibly because they were less confident about the assurances of confidentiality. This undoubtedly led to my collecting less rich data from these students and perhaps also portraying them in less nuanced ways.

I also acknowledge my role in analysing and reporting the data. The process of moving from the respondents' voices to writing up the research findings inevitably involves selection and interpretation and therefore it is important to critically examine my own role in this process. To paraphrase Nancy MacDonald's (2001) reflections on her ethnography of graffiti subcultures in New York and London: *the reality is that I am not a 'blank slate' and therefore I analysed the data with an 'open mind' rather than an empty one!*

Alongside the theoretical concepts which informed the case-study research, I acknowledge there is likely to be a *personal imprint* on how I chose to report analytical themes. However, I was continually questioning the means by which the data was coded and analyzed, and checking at every possible instance to clarify *exactly* what the respondents had been asked, the wording of the responses and their *meaning*. Where possible, I have included the 'researcher's voice' (in the form of direct quotations), enabling readers to understand the nature of the data collection process, the relationships between myself – the researcher – and the participants, and how interpretations were formed. Although participants 'speak for themselves' in Chapters 5 and 6, I have, of course, had an 'editorial role' (Atkinson, 2004) in reporting and constructing their accounts in order to make them accessible and to generate theoretical insights. However, to avoid simply 'sprinkling' the text with the most 'readable' quotes I have also integrated 'broken' speech and 'less readable' parts of dialogue into these empirical chapters (Atkinson, 2004).

### ***Ethical considerations***

All young people and teachers who participated were provided with information about the study, in order to give fully-informed consent before taking part, and made aware of their right to refuse to participate whenever and for whatever reason (see Appendices 5 and 6). Young people's parents/guardians received a letter providing information about this

research and giving them an opportunity to *opt out of the study* (see Appendix 7 for further details). This is now common practice for research with young people in schools, such as the RIPPLE study (Strange et al, 2006). This study gained approval from the LSHTM ethics committee before the fieldwork began.

All the data collected was done so in confidence, *except for any issues of child protection* (e.g. abuse) in which case participants would have been informed that it is *not possible* to keep this information confidential and that it would be passed on to the appropriate member of staff in the school.<sup>3</sup> Neither schools nor individuals participating in this study have been named or otherwise identified in any reports of the research and nor will they be in future.

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The following three chapters are the *empirical chapters* and present the findings from the systematic review (Chapter 4) and the case-study research (Chapters 5 and 6). Finally, referring back to research aims and questions presented in this chapter, Chapter 7 summarises and synthesises the results of the three empirical chapters in order to build theoretical insights about how young people's actions relating to drug use can be 'structured' in the context of secondary schools, as well as identifying the key implications for policy, practice and further research.

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<sup>3</sup> No child protection issues were disclosed during the data collection.

## Chapter 4. School effects on young people's drug use: a systematic review of intervention and observational studies

### Introduction

The aims and methods for the systematic review were described, above, in Chapter 3. In this chapter the findings of the systematic review are presented. This review fills an important research gap by mapping and synthesising existing high-quality quantitative studies examining school effects on young people's drug use as well as those examining how individuals' drug use relates to their experiences of, and attitudes to, school. The results are summarised and briefly discussed at the end of this chapter. These findings are discussed further, alongside the findings from the case-study research, in Chapter 7. The limitations of this review are also considered in Chapter 7.

### Description of studies

A total of 7290 records were screened against the inclusion criteria for each review (described in Chapter 3). Full reports of 226 were retrieved and screened for possible inclusion.

#### *Intervention studies*

Four studies met the inclusion criteria; they were all published since 2002 (Cuijpers et al, 2002; Perry et al, 2003; Bond et al, 2004; Flay et al, 2004). Two of the studies were carried out in the USA (Perry et al, 2003; Flay et al, 2004). The remaining two studies were carried out in the Netherlands and Australia (Cuijpers et al, 2002; Bond et al, 2004).

All the studies evaluated multi-component interventions which included school-level *and* individual-focused components. The interventions are summarised below in **Figure 3**. Although all the interventions made changes to aspects of the 'whole' school environment, their focus differed markedly. Three interventions – the Gatehouse project, Aban Aya youth project and D.A.R.E. plus – involved school action teams addressing overall school organisation and ethos alongside individual curriculum elements focused on health education or social/emotional development. The Aban Aya and Gatehouse projects also provided teacher training to promote a positive school environment. Unlike these studies, the Dutch Healthy School and Drugs project did *not* aim to make substantial changes to school ethos, and instead implemented new school rules focusing on smoking, drinking and drug use, and introduced new school committees to co-ordinate drug prevention and provision for drug-screening and interventions for individuals found to be using drugs.



**Figure 3: Summaries of interventions studied**

### **USA**

Flay and colleagues (2004) report the effects of the **Aban Aya youth project**, a multi-component school-based intervention to reduce young people's substance use, risky sexual behaviour and school problems. The intervention involved: setting up a task-force involving staff, students, parents and local residents to examine and amend school policies relating to young people's health, behaviour and the school ethos; developing links with community organisations and businesses; and training teachers to develop more interactive and culturally appropriate teaching methods. The overall aim was to 'rebuild the village' within schools and enhance students' sense of belonging and social support.

Perry and colleagues (2003) report the effects of **D.A.R.E. plus**, a multi-component school and community-based intervention that aimed to reduce school students' smoking, drinking, drug use and violence. The D.A.R.E. plus intervention is intended to boost the effects of the D.A.R.E. curriculum which previous studies have suggested is ineffective in changing behaviour. In addition to existing classroom-based health education delivered by police officers, D.A.R.E. plus schools established 'youth action teams' in schools to develop extra-curricular activities and provided peer-led social skills training for students and their parents. Neighbourhood action teams were also set up to address issues related to drug use. The intervention lasted for two school-years.

### **Australia**

Bond and colleagues (2004) report the effects of the **Gatehouse project**, a multi-component school-based intervention that aimed to reduce adolescent health risks, such as drug use, and promote emotional well-being. The intervention used school surveys to identify each school's needs and priorities and school-based action teams to revise school policies, promote a positive school environment and deliver an 'integrated' curriculum to promote social/emotional well-being. Education and health promotion professionals acted as consultants at each school and provided professional training to promote school engagement. The intervention lasted for two school-years.

### **The Netherlands**

Cuijpers and colleagues (2002) report the effects of the **Healthy School and Drugs project**, a multi-component school-based intervention that aimed to prevent secondary school students using drugs. The intervention schools implemented the following components: classroom-based health education delivered by teachers; a school committee also involving parents to co-ordinate drug prevention; new school rules on smoking, drinking and drug use; provision for drug screening; and interventions for individuals found to be using drugs. The intervention lasted for 3 years.

All four studies were deemed to be of high quality when judged against the quality-assessment criteria outlined above: three studies randomly allocated schools to an intervention or comparison group (Perry et al, 2003; Bond et al, 2004; Flay et al, 2004); one study matched intervention and control schools according to socio-demographic factors, reported no significant baseline differences in terms of age or gender and adjusted for prior health behaviours (Cuijpers et al, 2002). All the studies worked with samples of young people aged 10-15 years old but their cohorts differed in terms of their age at recruitment and thus the stage of their secondary/high school 'career': the Aban Aya youth project and D.A.R.E. plus evaluations recruited students aged 10-12 at (or near) the start of secondary school; the Gatehouse project and Dutch Healthy School and



Drugs project recruited students aged 12-14 who were further through secondary school. Loss at follow-up ranged between 10%-49% but did not differ significantly by allocation condition according to main potential confounders in any of these studies. The study designs, samples and intervention effects are summarised in **Table 1 (p. 65 - 68)**. The Aban Aya youth project and Gatehouse project studies adjusted for clustering in the analysis; the D.A.R.E. plus and Dutch Healthy School and Drugs project studies did not.

Neither the outcomes related to drug use reported in these studies nor the interventions were sufficiently homogenous to be subjected to statistical meta-analysis and therefore the findings are synthesised narratively.

### *Observational studies*

Eighteen studies met the inclusion criteria; they were published between 1985 and 2005 (Holmberg, 1985; Brook et al, 1989; Rhodes and Jason, 1990; McBride et al, 1991; Agnew and White, 1992; O'Donnell et al, 1995; Brunnsma and Rockquemore, 1998; Murguia et al, 1998; Eccles and Barber, 1999; Ellickson et al, 1999; Ensminger, 2002; Gil et al, 2002; Bryant et al, 2003; Zimmerman and Schmeelk-Cone, 2003; McNeely and Falci, 2004; West et al, 2004; Darling, 2005; Henry et al, 2005). All but two of these studies were carried out in the USA: one was carried out in Scotland (West et al, 2004); and one study was carried out in Sweden (Holmberg, 1985).

Only nine of these eighteen studies were deemed to be of high quality when judged against the quality-assessment criteria outlined above. The characteristics and findings of these studies are summarised in **Table 2 (p. 69 – 71)**. The other studies did not adjust for, or restrict by, students' socio-economic status (Holmberg, 1985; Brook et al, 1989; Rhodes and Jason, 1990; McBride et al, 1991; Agnew and White, 1992; Ensminger, 2002; Gil et al, 2002; Zimmerman and Schmeelk-Cone, 2003; Henry et al, 2005).

Only two high-quality studies reported associations between *school*-level exposures and young people's drug use (Brunnsma and Rockquemore, 1998; West et al, 2004). Seven high-quality studies reported associations between *individual*-level school-related exposures and drug use (O'Donnell et al, 1995; Murguia et al, 1998; Eccles and Barber, 1999; Ellickson et al, 1999; Bryant et al, 2003; McNeely and Falci, 2004; Darling, 2005).

Neither the outcomes related to drug use reported in these studies nor the exposures were sufficiently homogenous to be subjected to statistical meta-analysis and therefore the findings are synthesised narratively.

## **Results: intervention studies**

### *Effects on young people's drug use*

The Aban Aya study reported that, four years after the start of the intervention, there was a 34% reduction in the rate of increase of a combined measure of alcohol, tobacco and cannabis use for boys in the intervention group compared to the comparison group. Boys at D.A.R.E. plus schools reported a significantly lower rate of 'growth' in the use of drugs other than cannabis, and intentions to use drugs, compared to the comparison group, after two years of the intervention. These interventions had no significant effect on girls' substance use. Three years after the start of the Gatehouse project, fewer young people in the intervention group than the control group reported having used cannabis in the last six months. There was a 3.1% risk difference between the intervention and comparison group, a non-significant association. Although the Dutch Healthy School and Drugs project had a significant positive effect on young people's health-related knowledge, it had no effect on the number of the students who had used cannabis at the end of the intervention; of those students who had used cannabis, cannabis appeared to be used more frequently among students at intervention schools compared to control schools.

### *Effects on other outcomes*

Three studies reported rates of smoking and drinking separately from young people's drug use. All three suggested that the interventions had a protective effect for these outcomes. At the end of the D.A.R.E. plus intervention, boys reported fewer occasions when they had drunk alcohol in the last month and the last year and were less likely to be current smokers. Evaluation of the Gatehouse project showed non-significant but consistent 3% to 5% protective risk differences, such as for students drinking alcohol in the last month, smoking in the last month, smoking regularly and their friends' substance use. The Dutch Healthy School and Drugs project found that students in the intervention were drinking less alcohol than the control group and smoking less.

Three studies reported outcomes relating to school conduct and education. The Aban Aya study found that intervention reduced violent acts, bullying and truancy and school suspension for boys. The D.A.R.E. plus intervention had borderline-significant effects on reducing violence at school among boys. The Gatehouse project had no significant impact on measures of bullying, school relationships and students' depressive symptoms. The Dutch Healthy School and Drugs project did not aim to influence school relationships.



## Results: observational studies

### *School-level associations*

The *West of Scotland study* followed students from the end of primary school (age 11) into secondary school and measured health behaviours at ages 13 and 15 (West et al, 2004). It found that the number of students who had used drugs, regularly drank alcohol and smoked were significantly lower in some secondary schools than others and these large variations remained after adjusting for potential confounding arising from students' health behaviours prior to entry to secondary school, individual and family socio-demographic factors, parental behaviour, disposable income and religion, as well as neighbourhood using postal district data. The adjusted OR for the difference in outcomes between a school at the bottom 2.5<sup>th</sup> centile and the top 97.5<sup>th</sup> centile were 2.8 for drug use, 3.4 for drinking and 2.9 for smoking at age 15 ( $P < 0.001$ ) which suggests that there are important school-level effects on substance use.

The authors attempt to explain these apparent school effects via analyses of schools' aggregate levels of students' perceptions and attitudes. After adjustment for confounding, the study found significant associations between school-level rates of drug use at ages 13 and 15 and the number of students' in a school reporting disengagement (based on questions on how much they liked school, felt safe and part of their school) as well as poor teacher-student relationships. These factors were also associated with regular drinking and smoking at age 13 and 15 (adjusted odds ratios (OR) 1.19-1.55;  $P < 0.001$ ). This study also found that students' involvement at school was associated with lower rates of drug use, drinking and smoking, although these associations were no longer significant after adjusting for school disengagement and teacher-student relationships. The authors also report that schools which were perceived by the aggregate of pupils to be worse in terms of the school environment, pupil involvement, pupil engagement and teacher-pupil relations had poorer health outcomes, in terms of the numbers of student's smoking at 13 (OR 1.14;  $P < 0.05$ ). A second set of analyses involving researcher-derived measures found that larger schools with a poorer ethos – based on a priori ratings of the school organisation and pupil behaviour – were associated with high rates of student drug use at age 13 (OR 1.13;  $P < 0.05$ ) but not at age 15.

The only other high-quality study of school-level associations reported no association between school-uniform policies and drug use, drinking, smoking, absenteeism or students' behaviour at school (Brunsma and Rockqu Shore, 1998).

### *Individual-level associations*

The US *National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health* (McNeely et al, 2004) found that high-school students aged 15 who reported that they were treated fairly by their teachers and felt that their teachers cared about them were significantly less likely to have tried cannabis one year later or started smoking cannabis regularly (more than four times a month) one year later. Teacher support was also protective against getting drunk more than 2 or 3 times in the last month (relative risk (RR) 0.86;  $P < 0.001$ ), having smoked on at least 20 days in the last month (RR 0.84;  $P < 0.001$ ) and not using a condom when having sex for the first time (RR 0.91;  $P < 0.05$ ). These associations all remained significant after adjustment for students' socio-demographic characteristics: age, gender, ethnicity, family structure and household income. This study also found that school disengagement predicted cannabis use, however this effect was no longer significant after adjusting for students' reports of teacher support.

Using data from the *Seattle Social Development study*, O'Donnell and colleagues (1995) reported that boys considered to be at 'high risk' of drug use aged 12-13, based on teachers' reports of their 'aggressive' behaviour, and who were rated as having low 'bonding' to school using a 22-item scale, which assessed commitment and attachment to school, educational expectations and teachers support, were significantly more likely to be using cannabis, drinking alcohol and smoking when followed up a year later, even after adjustment for age, gender and social background (O'Donnell et al, 1995). A US study of White and Hispanic high-school students, found that those doing well at school and getting on well with teachers at age 13 were less likely to be using drugs in early adulthood (Murguia et al, 1998).

One study of US high-school students did not find a clear association between school disengagement and subsequent higher rates of drug use: Bryant and colleagues (2003) reported that, although greater increases in cannabis use during adolescence were predicted by feeling 'left out' or lonely at school and a composite measure of 'school misbehaviour' based on student reports of suspensions, detentions, being sent to see senior staff and truanting, student reports of not being interested at school and not enjoying school were not associated with increased cannabis use between ages 14 and 20 (Bryant et al, 2003). However, the authors acknowledge that these measures may not have fully reflected young people's attitudes to school. Parental involvement in young people's schooling did not predict drug use.

Two studies of US high-school students examined the association between students' participation in extra-curricular activities at school and subsequent drug use (Eccles and Barber, 1999; Darling, 2005). One reported that students who participated in more extra-curricular activities at high school were significantly less likely to have used cannabis and other drugs in the last year at age 17-18 and that involvement in extra-curricular activities



was also associated with more positive attitudes about school ( $P < 0.01$ ) (Darling, 2005). The other found that, after adjusting for prior health behaviours, age, sex, SES and educational attainment, extra-curricular involvement was not associated with drug use (Eccles and Barber, 1999). However, this study did find that involvement in extra-curricular activities was associated with young people's attitudes to school and their relationships with adults at school and school sports were associated with 'liking school' ( $P < 0.05$ ).

A study of school students in California indicated that attending a greater number of schools by age 15 had a borderline-significant association with later 'hard' drug use – defined as having used illegal drugs *other than* cannabis at age 17-18 – after adjusting for age, gender, prior drug use, parental income and education (Ellickson et al, 1999).

## Conclusion

Intervention studies provide evidence which suggests that there is **a causal association between, on the one hand, modifying the school environment to increase student participation, improve relationships, promote a positive school ethos and address disaffection and truancy and, on the other hand, reduced student drug use and other risk behaviours**, especially for boys. The lack of effects reported for girls may have been due to a lack of power because these outcomes were rarer among girls or because the changes did not address types of indirect aggressive behaviours, such as spreading rumours, and less physical forms of bullying which are more common among girls (Lagerspetz and Bjorkqvist, 1994). The Dutch Healthy School and Drugs project, which focused more narrowly on policies and practices concerning drug use and its prevention did not appear to reduce students' drug use for either boys or girls.

Students' *early experiences* of secondary/high school might be particularly influential: the Aban Aya and D.A.R.E. plus interventions appeared to have the most substantial effects on drug use and this may in part have reflected their targeting younger pupils. The results of the Gatehouse project trial did not attain statistical significance and this may have been because the intervention was delivered when students were aged 13-14 and *already* disaffected and disillusioned with school. This possibility receives support from the findings from a follow-up study conducted four years after the start of the trial which found that there was a statistically significant protective effect for subsequent cohorts of new students at Gatehouse schools compared to schools in the control group for a composite measure of health risk behaviours (OR 0.71; CI 0.52-0.97) (Patton et al, 2006).

Only one high-quality observational study focused on *school-level exposures* relating to ethos, as well as to aggregate pupil reports on the school environment, involvement,

engagement and teacher-pupil relations. This study suggested that ***poor ethos and negative aggregate student reports were associated with higher rates of drug use after adjustment for the main potential confounders***. There is some evidence that these apparent 'school effects' may be mediated by peer group structures. Analyses of cross-sectional, sociometric data (based on information about students' school social networks) from nine of the forty-three schools which took part in the *West of Scotland study* found that students' sociometric position and other 'network measures' (such as popularity) were associated with substance use after adjustment for age, gender and school SES but *the mediating effect of social networks varied between different socio-demographic groups and different school contexts* (Pearson et al, 2006). A further study, based on both sociometric and qualitative data from two of these schools which differed significantly in terms of the rates of student smoking rates, also suggested that peer-group structure and related influences might explain the variation between schools in terms of their smoking rates (Turner et al, 2006). These studies suggest that the concepts of social learning and social identity (discussed in Chapter 2) are instructive for exploring how school-level effects on individuals' actions relating to drug use are mediated, however, they also highlight the limitations of these concepts for understanding *why* certain groups actively adopt or reject certain behaviours as a key marker of belonging and/or identity, or *how* this process is shaped by school experiences.

A larger number of longitudinal observational studies focusing on *individual-level exposures* relating to school were identified and these studies found that ***disengagement from school and poor teacher-student relations were consistently associated with subsequent drug use and other risky health behaviours after adjustment for students' demographic characteristics, socio-economic status and prior drug use***. At least one additional study has been published since this review was completed which provides further evidence that 'low school connectedness' during early secondary school predicts substance use 2-4 years later (Bond et al, 2007). There was also evidence that truancy, suspension from school and frequent changes of school were associated with higher rates of drug use. These individual-level observational studies in isolation cannot provide evidence about school-level causal effects on student drug use but alongside the school-level intervention and observational studies they do add weight to the idea that young people's experiences at school might exert some influence on their drug use. These studies are particularly useful in providing some indications of possible causal processes. For example, a number of studies suggested that participation in extra-curricular activities and other forms of involvement at school might facilitate school 'bonding' and engagement, which in turn is a protective factor against drug use (Eccles and Barber, 1999; McNeely and Falci, 2004; West et al, 2004; Darling, 2005). One study also suggested students' reports of school disengagement might lie on a causal pathway between teacher support and risky health behaviours (McNeely and Falci, 2004).



Based on the studies included in this review, ***a plausible explanation regarding the process through which schools may influence drug use is that at schools which are less inclusive and where there are few opportunities to be involved and participate in extra-curricular activities, students may not feel part of their school nor receive the support they need and, in turn, may become dissatisfied with, and disengaged from, school and more likely to use drugs.*** This supports the predictive value of attachment theory – and the concept of school ‘bonding’ – in relation to students’ drug use (discussed in Chapter 2) but, once again, also highlights how psycho-social ‘variables’ provide limited theoretical insights regarding *why* certain schools are insufficiently positive and inclusive for some young people or *why* and *how* these students form more positive attitudes about drug use.

Taken together, this review also highlights the limitations of research conducted to date and supports the findings of other reviews which conclude that further research is needed to examine school-effects on health outcomes (Aveyard et al, 2004; Sellstrom and Bremberg, 2006). Research is needed to isolate the specific effects of whole-school elements and to explore further whether intervention effects are generalisable between settings. Such studies must employ cluster randomised controlled trials in order to minimise problems of bias and confounding in estimating effects, and employ integral process evaluations to describe what aspects of school organisation were addressed. Further research is also needed to examine students’ perspectives on the mechanisms through which experiences at school interact with other socio-structural and biographical factors to influence decisions regarding drug use. The following chapters present the findings from two case-study schools in London the aim of which was to explore, from the perspective of young people themselves, how schools are experienced by young people, how these experiences vary according to social background, gender, ethnicity and level of engagement, and the processes through which any ‘school effects’ on young people’s drugs may occur in the UK.

Table 1  
Summaries of high-quality intervention studies: study design, sample and intervention effects

Study	Setting	Study design	Sample size	Follow-up interval	Attrition rate	Effect of intervention on study outcomes
Aban Aya Youth Project (Flay et al, 2004)	USA urban poor African-American	Cluster randomised controlled trial (RCT)	<u>Schools</u> Intervention group N = 4 Control group N = 4 <u>Students</u> Intervention group N = 366 Control group N = 372	Age at baseline: 10-11  Follow-up: 4 years	49%	Relative reduction (RR) in growth rates of risk behaviours in the intervention group compared to the control group after adjustment for confounding (P value)  Boys Substance use RR=34% (P=0.05) Violence RR=47% (P=0.02) Bullying RR=59% (P=0.03) Truancy and school suspension RR=66% (P<0.001) Recent sexual intercourse RR=65% (P=0.02) Condom use RR=165% (P=0.045)  Girls* All outcomes No effect (P values not given)
D.A.R.E. plus (Perry et al, 2003)	USA urban, suburban and rural areas	Cluster (RCT)	<u>Schools</u> Intervention group N = 8 Control group N = 8 <u>Students</u>	Age at baseline: 11-12  Follow-up: 2 years	16%	Annual growth rates of risk behaviour scores in the intervention (and control (C) groups (P value)



			Intervention group N = 2221 Control group N = 1790			<p><b>Boys</b></p> <p><b>Cannabis use and intentions</b>  6 items; scale range 6-26)  I=0.76; C=0.98 (P=0.11)</p> <p><b>Other drug use and intentions</b>  21 items; scale range 21-102)  I=2.66; C=3.58 (P=0.05)</p> <p><b>Smoke every day</b>  (10 response categories)  I=0.18; C=0.31 (P=0.02)</p> <p><b>Alcohol use last month</b>  7 response categories)  I=0.08; C=0.14 (P=0.01)</p> <p><b>Alcohol use last year</b>  7 response categories)  I=0.19; C=0.26 (P=0.04)</p> <p><b>Ever drunk</b>  6 response categories)  I=0.11; C=0.15 (P=0.07)</p> <p><b>Violent behaviour and intentions</b>  5 items; scale range 5-25)  I=0.35; C=0.54 (P=0.06)</p> <p><b>Girls</b></p> <p><b>Cannabis use and intentions</b>  6 items; scale range 6-26)  I=0.61; C=0.73 (P=0.29)</p> <p><b>Other drug use and intentions</b>  21 items; scale range 21-102)  I=2.75; C=3.22 (P=0.27)</p> <p><b>Smoke every day</b>  (10 response categories)  I=0.22; C=0.28 (P=0.25)</p> <p><b>Alcohol use last month</b>  7 response categories)  I=0.08; C=0.12 (P=0.15)</p>
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							<b>Alcohol use last year</b> <i>7 response categories</i> <i>I=0.23; C=0.25 (P=0.36)</i> <b>Ever drunk</b> <i>6 response categories</i> <i>I=0.07; C=0.12 (P=0.11)</i> <b>Violent behaviour and intentions</b> <i>6 items; scale range 5-28</i> <i>I=0.23; C=0.30 (P=0.24)</i>
Gatehouse Project (Bond et al, 2004)	Victoria, Australia	Cluster RCT	<u>Schools</u> Intervention group N = 12 Control group N = 14 <u>Students</u> Intervention group N = 1335 Control group N = 1342	Age at baseline: 13-14  Follow-up: 3 years	10%		Adjusted odds ratios (OR) and 95% confidence intervals (CI) reported
							<b>Cannabis use in past 6 months</b> OR=0.81 CI=0.57-1.16 <b>Friends substance use</b> OR=0.71 CI=0.47-1.09 <b>Any smoking last month</b> OR=0.91 CI=0.67-1.24 <b>Regular smoking (6 of last 7 days)</b> OR=0.79 CI=0.58-1.07 <b>Any drinking last month</b> OR=0.96 CI=0.69-1.33 <b>Heavy drinking</b> OR=1.02 CI=0.71-1.66 <b>Bullied</b> OR=0.88 CI=0.68-1.13 <b>Arguments at school</b> OR=0.90 CI=0.64-1.28 <b>School attachment</b> OR=1.22 CI=1.00-1.48 <b>Depressive symptoms</b> OR=1.08 CI=0.86-1.36
Healthy School and Drugs	The Netherlands	Quasi-experimental	<u>Schools</u> Intervention group N = 9	Age at baseline: 12-13	27%		Comparison of intervention (and control (C)) groups P value)



Project (Cuijpers et al, 2002)		study (matched control group)	Control group N = 3 <u>Students</u> Intervention group N = 1156 Control group N = 774	Follow-up: 3 years		<p>Drugs knowledge score I=1.30; C=1.12 (P&lt;0.001)</p> <p>Self-efficacy to avoid drug use score I=4.71; C=4.67 (NS)**</p> <p>Ever used cannabis I=17%; C=19% (NS)**</p> <p>Monthly use of cannabis I=59%; C=51% (P&lt;0.05)</p> <p>Ever smoked I=31%; C=34% (NS)**</p> <p>Cigarettes smoked/day I=28.41; C=29.72 (NS)**</p> <p>Ever drunk alcohol I=74%; C=81% (P&lt;0.001)</p> <p>Drink alcohol every week I=44%; C=57% (P&lt;0.05)</p> <p>Drinks/week I=4.06; C=5.27 (P&lt;0.01)</p> <p>Drinks/occasion I=4.79; C=5.82 (P&lt;0.001)</p>
<p>*Effects sizes not reported.</p> <p>**P value not reported.</p>						

**Table 2**  
**Characteristics and findings of high-quality observational studies**

Dataset	Country	Sampling strategy	Sample size	Follow-up interval	Drug use measure(s)	Effect of exposures on drug use*
<b>Studies measuring school-level exposures</b>						
<b>West of Scotland 11-16 study</b> (West et al, 2004)	Scotland, UK	<u>Schools</u> Stratified random sampling <u>Students</u> Stratified, random sampling	<u>Primary schools</u> N = 135 <u>Secondary schools</u> N = 43 <u>Students</u> N = 2586	Age at baseline: 11  Follow-up interval: 4 years	Ever used illicit drugs (age 15)	Disengagement OR=1.32 (P<0.001) Poor teacher-student relations OR=1.55 (P<0.001) Involvement OR=0.92 (P<0.05) Poor overall social environment (aggregate of student's perceptions and attitudes) OR=1.02 (n/s) School size OR=1.05 (n/s) Poor school ethos (independently-rated) OR=1.09 (n/s) School denomination OR=0.93 (n/s)
<b>National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988</b> (Brunsma and Rockquemore, 1998)	USA	<u>Schools</u> Stratified random sampling <u>Students</u> Stratified random sampling	<u>Schools</u> N/S <u>Students</u> N = 4578	Age at baseline: 13-14  Follow-up interval: 2 years	Cannabis use in the last year/30 days	School uniforms No association



Studies measuring individual-level school-related exposures							
<b>National Longitudinal study of Adolescent Health</b> (McNeely and Falci, 2004)	USA	<u>Schools</u> Stratified sample of US high schools <u>Students</u> Representative sample	<u>Schools</u> N = 80 <u>Students</u> N = 13,570	Age at baseline: Ave. 15  Follow-up interval: 1 year	Ever used cannabis	Teacher support RR=0.87 (P< 0.001) School engagement RR=0.95 (P<0.05)	Poor teacher-student relations RR=0.88 (P< 0.001) School disengagement RR=0.97 (n/s)
					No. of times used cannabis in the last 30 days		
<b>Seattle Social Development Project</b> (O'Donnell et al, 1995)	USA	<u>Schools</u> Purposive sample of schools to over-represent high-crime neighbourhoods <u>Students</u> Boys defined as 'aggressive' at age 11 based on teacher reports	<u>Schools</u> N = 18 <u>Students</u> N = 74	Age at baseline: 12-13  Follow-up interval: 1 year	Cannabis use in the last 30 days	Low school bonding Positive association (P<0.05)	
<b>USA Dataset N/S</b> (Murguia et al, 1998)	USA	<u>Schools</u> Randomly selected <u>Students</u> N/S	<u>Schools</u> N = 18 <u>Students</u> N = 7618	Age at baseline: 13  Follow-up interval: 10 years	Ever used cannabis	Positive school experiences Negative association (P<0.05)	Positive school experiences Negative association (P<0.05)
					Ever used other illicit drugs	Positive school experiences Negative association (P<0.05)	
<b>Monitoring the Future study</b> (Bryant et al, 2003)	USA	<u>Schools</u> Nationally-representative sample <u>Students</u> A sub-sample of eighth-graders	<u>Schools</u> N/S <u>Students</u> N = 1,975	Age at baseline: 14  Follow-up interval: 6 years	Cannabis use in the last 30 days	School 'misbehaviour' Positive association (P<0.001) Feeling 'left out' Positive association (P<0.05) School interest No association School enjoyment	

			were recruited at each participating school				No association Parental involvement No association
<b>Michigan Study of Adolescent Life Transitions</b> (Eccles and Barber, 1999)	USA		<u>Schools</u> N/S <u>Students</u> N/S	<u>Schools</u> N/S <u>Students</u> N = 1259	Age at baseline: 15 <i>Follow-up interval:</i> 6 years	No. of times used cannabis in the last 6 months	Participation in extra-curricular activities No association
<b>USA Dataset N/S</b> (Darling, 2005)	USA		<u>Schools</u> Purposeful sample to represent a diverse sample in terms of school size, location, socio-economic background and ethnic composition <u>Students</u> All students	<u>Schools</u> N = 6 <u>Students</u> N = 3,761	Age at baseline: 13-14 <i>Follow-up interval:</i> 3 years	Cannabis use in the last year  Other illicit drug use in the last year	Participation in extra-curricular activities Negative association (P<0.01)  Participation in extra-curricular activities Negative association (P<0.01)
<b>RAND adolescent Panel Study</b> (Ellickson et al, 1999)	USA		<u>Schools</u> Urban, suburban and rural schools <u>Students</u> N/S	<u>Schools</u> N = 30 <u>Students</u> N = 4,070	Age at baseline: 15-16 <i>Follow-up interval:</i> 2 years	Illicit drug use in the last year other than cannabis	No. of changes of school OR=1.07 (P=0.07)
*Key to results: OR and CI denote adjusted odds ratio and 95% confidence interval where reported; RR denotes adjusted relative ratios; P denotes the result of statistical tests of significance where reported while n/s denotes none significance where P values are not reported.							



## Chapter 5. Park Grove School case-study

### Introduction

Park Grove School is a mixed-sex 11-16 state school in an outer London borough. The most recent Ofsted *Inspection Report* described 'overall school standards' as 'outstanding' and praised the current head teacher and senior management team (SMT). The school is above the national average in terms of its GCSE results and near the top of its local education authority 'league table'. All the teachers I interviewed at Park Grove prioritised academic achievement, particularly at Key Stage 4 (14-16). As one teacher put it, academic achievement is always the 'over-arching' aim: *"ultimately it is all about achievement – that is obviously what the school is about, it's at the heart of our work. Everything else is to do with achievement so we might work on uniform, attendance and punctuality but the ultimate goal is for higher achievement"*. This emphasis was highly visible throughout the school site. For example, local newspaper articles about Park Grove students' GCSE successes and the school's 'position' in league tables were prominently displayed in the corridors and a large LCD monitor in the reception area – designed for displaying notices for students – regularly reported the proportion of last year of Year 11's GCSE students who had got five or more GCSEs at grade C or above and other academic 'success stories'. Maintaining the current high percentage of students who leave the school with five or more GCSEs at grades A\*-C was clearly a priority for teachers. However, one head of department whom I interviewed explained that *"adding value to each child"*, over and above how well they are expected to do, was now an equally important 'target' for the school management: *"Right from the start here we have this thing called the Fischer Family Trust [database], that's the key. I don't care, to a certain extent, exactly what grade they get but if they are beating their Fischer Family Trust prediction then they are doing well and that's what we are also celebrating here and aiming for"*. League tables based on this 'value-added' data are increasingly seen as a more valid measure of a school's 'performance' and the senior management team at Park Grove appeared keen to maintain their strong 'league' position and reputation for academic success.

Ofsted inspectors have also praised the school environment at Park Grove and the 'systems' it had in place, such as the innovative 'virtual learning environment' which allowed teachers and parents to access a student's records from any computer in school or on-line. Since the current head teacher had been in post the school had been granted specialist college status – which provides schools with an additional one-off grant of £100k plus a recurrent annual top-up grant of £129 per pupil – and had also received over £3m in funding to improve the school buildings. The teachers welcomed these additional sources of funding and, as one put it, *"the heads clever use of [the money]"* to improve the quality of teaching at the school and the physical environment. A head of department who had been at the school for several

years explained that: *“the money here that has come in for us as a specialist college has been used in the right way, basically giving time out to heads of department, heads of year. For instance, rather than teach something like 48 out of 60 periods say, which I’d do at most schools, I teach about 42 out of 60 and that does make a difference, like I’ve had time to do three observations of my department this week”*. The teachers also felt that additional revenue was being ‘spread around well’ across several different new initiatives and they thought that this provided them with more opportunities to ‘move up’, take on extra responsibilities and earn more money: *“I guess because we have a lot of new initiatives as well and so they will make new positions with these new initiatives so that is why there are a lot of new roles and opportunities for promotions here”*.

A recurring theme that emerged from the interviews with the students (even those that disliked the school) was that they were all aware that Park Grove had a reputation as a ‘good school’. One teacher who had worked at the school for several years told me, *“the kids are really starting to understand more and more what a good, over-subscribed school it is”*. Furthermore, the school’s improved reputation had meant that its intake of students now included, what one teacher described as, *“more of the cream of the crop”* as more middle-class parents moved into the catchment area. However, the school is still comprehensive and fairly representative in terms of its intake, especially as local grammar schools still attract the most ‘privileged’ students in the Borough: *“I’d say [Park Grove] was fairly typical of a school in London although it is slightly more middle-class than an average school, if you like, in London – but it depends what sort of average you’re taking – that’s the mathematician in me coming out!”* More than one in five students at Park Grove were eligible for free school meals and a quarter were considered to have ‘special educational needs’, which is above the national average. In terms of student’s ethnicity, approximately 55 per cent considered themselves to be white British on the last school census. The other large ethnic groups at the school were: students of Asian heritage (approx. 20%); black and ‘dual heritage’ students (approx. 15%); and Greek and Greek-Cypriot students (approx. 5%). In addition, there are also a small number of Eastern European, Turkish and Iranian students, as well as students of several other nationalities. Overall, English was not the first language for a third of the students, which is *significantly* above the national average. In short, Park Grove has a diverse and multi-cultural student population as well as a significant proportion of middle-class students.

Although staff at Park Grove prioritised and ‘celebrated’ students’ achievement, they acknowledged there was a significant minority of students at Park Grove who didn’t fit into this academic culture; the teachers described these students as those who didn’t ‘care’, didn’t want to ‘please’ and ‘impress’ them as much and who didn’t want to go on to college and university and ‘do well’. One teacher estimated that in Year 10, *“there is say a hardcore of twenty or thirty out of one-hundred and eighty students who don’t care”*. Ten of the fifteen



students I interviewed for this case-study were purposively selected from this 'hardcore' of disengaged students in order to explore these young people's accounts of secondary school and their attitudes and actions relating to drug use, and the links between these. In other words, the aim was to understand how aspects of these young people's school-lives – such as the pressures they face from teachers and the friendships they make – and their post-16 options can be implicated in their attitudes and choices about drug use. In addition, a further five Year 10 students were randomly selected from the school register in order to gain a wider range of views and experiences. In total, eight girls and seven boys were interviewed (see Appendix 1 for more details about the young people's socio-demographic characteristics).

A key theme across all these students' accounts of their experiences at Park Grove was that by Year 10 they had found their 'place' and gained 'acceptance' as part of a certain 'group': according to one student, *"it was a bit confusing at first... but by year 10 everyone has mixed up and found their place"*; another explained, *"everyone has to find acceptance...and everyone just groups off with each other"*. Once they had 'found' their 'group', students would 'stick' together: *"as you're growing up in the different years you decide which group of people you wanna hang around with and through the years you stick with that group and it gets bigger"*. One teacher who had worked in London for over fifteen years thought that this was inevitable: *"I'm sure they do have to fall into some sort of grouping in school...I think school does really, by its very nature, divide people up because it's such a big scary place and students need safety in numbers"*. It was also apparent that some 'groups' of students at Park Grove had formed strong identities based on their shared 'styles', attitudes towards school and through the spaces they occupied at school. Most interestingly in terms of this study, the adoption or rejection of certain 'risky' health behaviours, such as drug use, appeared to be a key factor in the identity of some of these different groups of students. As one student summed it up, *"all the people that smoke and do drugs and that at this school are all in similar groups of people – then you [also] get football boys, or your rugby boys, you get your sport girls, and you get your nice girly girls – it's just particular groups of people"*. Through analysing the views and experiences of students at Park Grove it was therefore possible to not only explore how individual student's accounts of school life related to their attitudes and actions regarding drug use but to also explore how the school environment may structure aspects of young people's 'social networks', such as peer group structures and their social identity, and how these factors may relate to their attitudes and actions regarding drug use.

The following sections describe: how students experienced school and formed friendships; how this related to their identity-work, particularly their choices about drug use and the 'scenes' they identified with; and, how this differed according to students' family background, gender, ethnicity and level of engagement. In order to develop theory about how institutional

factors and school experiences might structure drug use the accounts of different 'groups' of students are reported in detail to highlight the importance of students' peer groups, and their identity relating to drug use, as a 'resource' for young people at school. Firstly, the accounts of three 'counter-school' girls are reported (the 'hyper girls'), and then contrasted to (a) other disengaged girls who formed their identities and 'counter-cultures' *out of school* and (b) 'pro-education' female students. Secondly, the accounts of boys who identified with three different school 'groups' are presented in detail to examine the connections between students' school experiences, group cultures and drug use: the 'football lads'; the black and mixed-race Hip Hop boys; and the 'indie kids'. In each of these sections the views and experiences of other students – and the teachers – are also drawn on, as well as observations and documentary evidence, to gain further insights about these student 'groups' and the institutional 'rules', such as policies and practices relating to assessment, streaming and discipline.

### **'Hyper' girls: escaping from 'prison'**

Three of the girls I interviewed – Jaz, Nadine and Ruby – had all met at Park Grove School, become very close friends and adopted a distinctive counter-school *way of life* (culture) – in which cannabis and other substance use appeared to provide a source of bonding and identity, an alternative marker of status and an opportunity to 'escape' the pressures of school, resist education and 'have a laugh'. All three were white, had grown up in London and considered themselves the same 'class of people'. Family problems were a recurring theme when these students talked about their lives. Jaz explained why these problems had given them a common 'understanding' and brought them closer together:

- Jaz: *It's just like – Nadine she's one of my best friends, she's like a sister too, and Ruby too [...] we are a three-way thing. Whatever one of us does, we all just do. Our backgrounds are similar – like the things that have happened in the past so we've all an understanding.*
- Adam: *What do you mean by the things that have happened?*
- Jaz: *Well like Ruby was in care for eight years and her dad is like gone off – I dunno where – and her mum is like an alcoholic and she is off back into care again cos her mum has gotta go back to rehab. Nadine has been kicked out of her house, her dad has fucked off too... My dad's not here – he died [...] my mum was an alcoholic – she would never be at home, always in the pub. My mum was always pissed, I had to stop her from smashing everything up and puking everywhere.*

Jaz, Nadine and Ruby all held strong *anti-school* attitudes and particularly resented how the school regime treated them as 'children'. As Jaz explained, *"I've had to be an adult for like my whole life really... but oh no, they just think they always know best 'cos they are the teacher and we are the students and we've gotta listen to them"*. All these students had extremely poor relationships with lots of the teachers and were frustrated that the teachers were not interested in students' 'backgrounds'. Nadine felt angry that, *"some of the teachers*



*treat you like nothing – it's like you want respect, give me some... I'm not giving them any respect if they don't give me any". Ruby felt that the teachers needed to accept "where she was coming from" and she was unwilling to change: "at the end of the day if they don't like the way my attitude is it's up to them, 'cos I'm not going sit there and ask all nice questions and that". These students were not involved in the school's programme of activities after-school, as Jaz put it: "the only extra-curricular activities I do are detentions!" They were also frustrated that only the 'geeks'/'bods' had a 'say' at school. Jaz thought they wouldn't be allowed on the school council even if they wanted to be involved because "everyone just thinks, oh they won't turn up". A member of school management team who I interviewed admitted that the school could do more to give a wider range of students a voice at the school: "It's always the same sort of kids [on the school council], there's not many who you could say were rebellious".*

These students also resented the school's emphasis on academic excellence and "high standard GCSEs", a culture they did not 'fit' into. According to Nadine, *"it's like a private school... [The head] wants it to be the best school in the world, she wants everything to be perfect". One of the more senior teachers I interviewed told me that he thought the 'prefect system' at Park Grove was important for 'inspiring' and 'rewarding' students, however, this system of "giving the bods even more responsibilities" re-enforced Nadine's dislike of school. These students couldn't be 'perfect' at school like the 'bods' because their family-life was much more unhappy, often traumatic, and they found the learning much more difficult. Jaz thought that it was 'unfair' because "some kids are like down to their work and wanna get an education, be a doctor, get a husband, live a happy life and all that but other people can't be bothered... they [are] stressed and some things at home are happening". They all particularly disliked the head teacher and the value she placed on 'perfect exam marks', and they refused to adapt – instead stressing their own agency – as this quote highlights.*

*Adam: What sort of school does [the Head] want?*

*Jaz: The perfect school. In assembly all she talks about is 'our school is in the newspaper, we are the perfect school blah blah'. That's all she wants – the perfect school – and that's why we're all like worry-boxed [?].*

*Adam: What do you think about being in the newspaper then?*

*Jaz: It's good and that to big up your school but not every assembly 'blah blah, keep it that way blah blah'. She's showing off something she ain't done when we've had to do it all. It's like you ain't done nothing.*

*Adam: What is she mainly bothered about?*

*Jaz: Exam marks. How tidy the school is. It's not her doing it! It's us doing it but she doesn't give any credit for it. I can walk round school with my tie undone, my shirt out and that. Yeah, I'd get in trouble – but I can do what I wanna do.*

Jaz, Nadine and Ruby explained how they were "always in the bottom set with all the other nut-heads!" Although they felt they didn't get the support they needed and were 'labelled' by the teachers, they also admitted that they made "basically no effort" with their school work

and liked to *“wind up [the teachers] ‘cos it’s funny”*. It appeared that the practice of streaming students into ‘sets’ may accentuate problems for these students by grouping all the ‘naughty people’ together: *“Everyone in the bottom sets, they were all the naughty people – I was with every other naughty person and it wasn’t a good combination of people for the teachers!”*

Ruby explained that she had poor relationships with lots of the teachers and she was not expecting to do well at school:

Adam: *Do you get on with the teachers?*

Ruby: *If they help, I’ll help them and do what they say.*

Adam: *What about the other ones though?*

Ruby: *Oh, some of them are just like I haven’t got time – der der der – and they just expect all the good people, and praise all the good people – that’s when I start getting pissed off and that, start kicking off. You’re trying to get some help with your work and they are like ‘hand me it, you’re supposed to do this, don’t do this, work expert der der der’. It’s when they talk to you like that and you’re stuck then you get angry and that [...] some teachers expect me to do more than I came for.*

Adam: *What are you thinking about your GCSEs at the moment?*

Ruby: *I don’t have a clue!*

Disconnected from the dominant markers of success and progress at Park Grove, Jaz, Nadine and Ruby admitted that the only point of school was to see each other and *“to have a laugh”*. Their actions and shared identity at school as *“chatty, naughty, smokers [and] hyper”* made sense based on the position they found themselves in at school by Year 10. Smoking cigarettes and cannabis outside school appeared to provide the opportunity to escape the stress and humiliation of school, ‘chat’ and gain some respect by looking ‘cool’ and more ‘grown up’. These students also dismissed the ‘school stars’ (who had already got their identity and markers of success) as ‘fakers’ if they smoked. Nadine explained that *“them are just dickheads ‘cos they’re just doing it for the sake of it, some of ‘em are just normal”*. The interview process itself was a further opportunity for these girls to construct their ‘hyper’ identity and to *label themselves* as the ‘blazers’/‘stoners’. For example:

Adam: *How do you think this school is divided up?*

Ruby: *There is all different kind of groups. Quiet people, loud people, and then blazers like me!*

They had also adopted their own alternative version of the ‘official’ school uniform based on mini-skirts, ‘untucked’ shirts, short ties and big ‘hoop’ earrings, which caused further arguments between them and the teachers. Taken together with their behaviour, their *style* appeared to have the intention of making them look and feel ‘more adult’ and also conformed to highly feminised and sexualised representations of womanhood. It also differentiated them markedly from other, male, anti-school groups whose identity was often formed around their youthfulness and masculinity.



Despite the commitment and creativity involved in creating this shared identity, other students and the teachers simply described students such as Jaz, Nadine and Ruby as either 'townie', 'chav' or 'tarty' based on their style and their blatant anti-school actions and attitudes. A young female teacher in her first year at the school told me that she was *"quite shocked how chavy some of the girls were"*. Another (male) teacher described them as *"the tarty ones, lots of make-up, [they] accentuate their femaleness and femininity more than the other girls – these are the girls who push the rules of uniform to the max and basically are always in trouble and arguing with the teachers about it – it's all related to their age image thing the smoking and drug use."*

Their highly visible identity appeared to have become problematic by the start of Year 10, when I first interviewed these girls. The school appeared to be strongly focused on preparing its Year 10 students for GCSE coursework and exams and it had established practices and technologies to monitor, divide up and punish 'hyper' students who could be disruptive. This highlights how schools constrain, as well as enable, certain actions. They all told me that they were increasingly 'fed up' with school and all frequently referred to the school as a 'prison' characterised by a lack of 'private' space and highly restrictive rules which were enforced through intensive surveillance and CCTV. Jaz described her experience of the school environment:

*"There is a camera in every hallway you go in. It's like a prison. I've got two dinner ladies every break and lunchtime that are always following me [...] I ain't even joking! they've got these walkie talkies going, 'she's in the maths corridor der der der' and that".*

Occasionally in staff briefings senior teaching staff encouraged teachers to monitor and 'log' information about specific student's behaviour throughout the day. It was also apparent from interviewing one of the heads of department that the senior teaching staff made sure that each department would *"follow Fisher Family Trust data religiously to monitor students progress and make sure they add value"*, which is a further example of this surveillance culture as the school tracks and crudely labels any 'underperforming' students. Ruby even seemed to realise that the school was acting in the interest of the majority of students but at the expense of a minority of students such as herself: *"It's good education but it's too much, you can hardly do nothing if you're me, you're being watched all the time and you're being followed, [they should] leave me in peace!"* Furthermore, the school had recently introduced a new system of electronically monitoring and recording behaviours on a centralised system which parents can access at home:

Jaz: *You know that new thing they've got on the computers. It's like a new register and it's [on] all the computers...right, there is a computer in every classroom now and every time someone does anything bad they write down what you've down and it's all in your file and you just can't get rid of it basically unless you log on and delete it all. So if*

*you've got like a little bit of your shirt untucked they go and type it all in, or if your earrings are too big. I get about hundred things put on in a week – you don't understand how much trouble you get in over the minorest things 'cos so much is logged on to it.*

Adam: *What do you think of the teachers who do that then?*

Jaz: *You think calm yourself man!*

They were also often forced to sit in 'isolation' all day and trying to 'have a laugh' had become a *"headache... the problem is that you get in shit now basically"*. As certain blatant anti-school responses became more difficult, like *"having a laugh"* in class because *"you get sent to sit on your own in isolation for two days"*, more passive and 'mellow' forms of resistance to the teachers and school work, such as being 'stoned' and 'chilled out', appeared to have become an alternative response for these students. They admitted that since they had been in Year 10 they would normally go to 'Granny's Alley' before school to 'smoke weed': *"We all met up at like eight O'clock, smoke a zute [cannabis joint] then go down the shop for the munchies, then we'd go in school absolutely bollocksed"*. They had also started to *"walk out of school"* to go to the shop and 'chill out'. Therefore, while publicly smoking cigarettes appeared to have offered these students the opportunity to identify themselves as either 'big' or 'bad', or both, 'blazing' [smoking cannabis] appeared to also offer them a more 'chilled out' anti-school response and a ready-made excuse for not doing well at school and ignoring the teachers. Jaz was quick to emphasis how *"it makes me slow and I get dozy from blazing"* and explained that she was now *"more mellow...I'm like stop shouting at me man"*. In other words, it helped them 'escape' from the reality of school and formed part of a more passive resistance to education. As Ruby explained:

*"When you're chilled before school you're just like really tired and everything is a blur and you're not concentrating on the work. Everyone who is normal can concentrate and answer questions and stuff [...] When you're stoned and the teachers asks you a question you either crack up laughing or just start stuttering and everything. When you're normal you're on the ball"*.

This type of identity-work is similar to one of the responses to school identified by Shereen Benjamin (2002) in her ethnography of an all-girls school in London: some groups of students who were stigmatised and marginalised because they had 'special educational needs' (SEN) actively portrayed themselves as 'lazy' and that therefore their struggles were arising through this laziness rather than a lack of ability or ambition. This process of 'image management' in the context of the highly public and individual nature of school achievement has also been described as 'self-handicapping' (Cotterell, 2007). In addition to being a 'resource' for their bonding and 'naughty', 'hyper' identity, cannabis also appeared to be an important 'resource' for coping with punishment and 'failure' at school.

These positive choices regarding cannabis may not only be a response to their 'position' and experiences at school but also to escape their difficult family backgrounds. Holly, another white, working-class student, also repeatedly stressed that the school was like a 'prison'.



She sometimes got 'pissed' on a weekend with her friends outside school but *she didn't report any drug use*. An important difference may have been that she lived with her mum and dad in a more stable environment and in *"an allright area [where] most people have jobs"*. The 'hyper' girls seemed to acknowledge that their choices also related to their difficult backgrounds and where they lived. This quote highlights how a combination of problems at home and stress at school can make 'having a spliff' such a relief:

- Jaz: *Most people who work [at school], they probably go in and it's all nice. They've probably got a mum and dad and a brother and a sister and dog and nice house, nice car [...] your background is what was you before this. Taking drugs makes you feel better.*
- Adam: *Can it make you feel better about school?*
- Jaz: *Yeah if someone can't be bothered about school, like you're having a bad day then just have a spliff in the morning then it's a good day. Pressure and stress can make people take drugs. [...] If people don't like the environment they're in they are not going to be comfortable and getting on at school.*

Jaz, Nadine and Ruby described how their weekends were structured around getting 'pissed' and 'stoned'. They called Friday 'high-day' and associated it with even heavier cannabis use than normal. Nadine explained that she would smoke cannabis both socially and on her own to 'chill out': *"on a weekend it'll be like an eight – twenty pound worth – on a normal school day it'll be a fives [£5] or a tens [£10] [...] If I've got my own I'll smoke it on my own, if I'm with my friends I'll smoke it with them"*. They also liked drinking and usually drank either cheap wines, such as Lambreeni, or spirits, such as vodka, sambuca and Archers (schnapps). They were actively making choices about the relative merits of different ways to 'escape' based on their own experiences: *"Being drunk is like – it can be either bad or good. You can be crying going my life is shit or you can be on top of the world"*. While Jaz thought getting drunk helped them *"to forget about what's happening and have fun"*, Nadine reported that she had often been sick through drinking and explained the advantages of getting 'stoned' over drinking: *"It's like when I've got draw [cannabis] I'm like yeah I've got draw man, lets go and skin up, then when you've puffed it's like relaxing, it makes you laugh, you get the munchies – it's not like drink where you end up getting violent, sick and upset and that"*. However, Nadine still associated getting 'stoned' with health and other problems:

- Adam: *How many joints would you have on a night?*
- Nadine: *Usually three or four.*
- Adam: *Is that sharing?*
- Nadine: *Yeah.*
- Adam: *And what does your mum say to you then when you get back in?*
- Nadine: *She's always like 'you've been smoking' and I just say no I haven't, I deny it. She makes me stand in the bathroom and open my eyes – she always knows.*
- Adam: *Do you worry that it affects your schooling?*
- Nadine: *I know it does. It's made me so slow and dozy from blazing [smoking cannabis].*
- Adam: *Do you worry about that?*

- Nadine: *Not really – but my mum thinks I'm going to be like my dad. He's in hospital now. He's got some mental problem, a depression thing and he smokes it as well, that's half of the reason why he's got it and my mum thinks I'm going to get that.*
- Adam: *Do you worry about the risk of mental health problems then?*
- Nadine: *[shakes her head]*

In addition to not appearing to worry about their 'slow', 'dozy' identity, partly because of the relief it provided from school – or 'prison' as they described it – and other problems, it also seemed that these difficulties at school meant that they had low expectations for the future and, in turn, less motivation to resist excessive consumption. By the end of Year 10 Ruby was the only one of them still at Park Grove although they still saw each other regularly on weekends. Ruby told me that she was, *"properly pissed off 'cos there is no-one left, they're just getting rid of all the bad people and it's just like all goody-goodies and that [...] they are finding more excuses to get people out and get better people in now"*. Nadine had been excluded and was attending a pupil referral unit and couldn't be contacted for a second interview. Jaz was working, unpaid, at a nursery four days a week until she was sixteen. This 'work experience' was organised by the school for her. She also attended a small, independent further education college briefly on Friday afternoons: *"I do an english paper or a math paper – depending what she gives me – then I go out for twenty minutes [to smoke] and then I do ICT until half two"*. In what appears to be example of *victim-blaming*, one teacher explained that the problem with Jaz and Nadine was that they didn't fit into in 'the Park Grove way': *"not all kids can follow school – especially weak ability kids – especially at Park Grove we have our strict rules and how things go and it just isn't suitable for everybody and it's just a shame there's not more units for less able kids"*. Despite her friends' experiences, Ruby was steadfast that she was not going turn into *"one of the goodie-goodies... I'm myself and I ain't changing myself for no-one"*. She was however increasingly aware that she was unlikely to get any qualifications and had increasingly fatalistic attitudes about the future which appeared to further reinforce her identity as a 'pisshead' and a 'bunhead' ['stoner'] and her motivation to *"have fun now"*.

Despite having to do an unpaid work placement at a nursery *"for posh people's kids who pay like a thousand pounds month"* for another year until she was able to leave full-time education, Jaz considered herself to the *"lucky one"* of the three because she had 'escaped' from school and didn't have to go to a pupil referral unit (PRU). She explained that Nadine's PRU *"was all boys and they were all black, obviously a little white girl going into a school with all bad, black boys isn't going to be good is it"*. For example, she'd told Jaz that other young people at the unit had stolen her mobile phone. When I re-interviewed Jaz during her 'work experience' she reflected back on her experiences at school and explained why it wasn't for her and why she would rather continue to work unpaid for another year (and forego any formal qualifications) rather than go back to school.



Adam: *How would you sum up your experiences at school then?*  
 Jaz: *Well, err – I would say my experiences at school were good and bad. I can't just say it was all crap 'cos some parts weren't.*  
 Adam: *What were the good bits then?*  
 Jaz: *Just mucking around with my mates!*  
 Adam: *So what was the point of school for you?*  
 Jaz: *Just to have a laugh really – by the time I got into year ten it wasn't funny anymore, I thought 'I don't know anything, I'm not going to get my GCSE's, I'm just going to fail'.*  
 Adam: *What do you mean you didn't know anything?*  
 Jaz: *I hadn't been in my maths class for two years 'cos my teacher chucked me out every time I walked in – so maths 'er ehh' ['incorrect' Family Fortunes noise]. English – I'm dyslexic so that's already mucked up for me. Other lessons I didn't really listen [...]*  
 Adam: *What sort of marks were you getting?*  
 Jaz: *Oh – I can't even remember. As soon as I got my paper back I used to rip it up and put it in the bin. I didn't look.*  
 Adam: *Why didn't you want to look?*  
 Jaz: *'Cos there is no effort put into it and if there is no effort it's not going to be exactly a good mark [...] this ['work experience' placement] is like a bonus really.*

However, if 'blazing' was a part of a pragmatic response to the day-to-day realities of being a 'failure' at Park Grove, leaving school early wasn't associated with any reduction in Jaz's cannabis use. She still smoked cannabis in the morning – before working in the nursery – and admitted that all she looked forward to all day was to: *"get in, go upstairs, have a shower, kutch [chill] on my bed, roll a zute, chill out – it's like pain relief".* She had also formed new relationships with older friends since she left school and she appeared to be taking a 'pick and mix' approach to drug use whereby she was increasingly happy to experiment with other drugs if they were available to her. She explained which drugs other than cannabis she had 'tried': *"I've tried a pill – it didn't really do anything to me though, I was expecting like a massive hit and to be seeing dolphins and elephants and that. It was like a smiley pill. [I've] tried a jaw locker pill. I've done coke – just like a couple of lines but that was pretty random at my mates house. Her older brother is a right Charlie-head. I just thought I'm going to try it at some point so I might as well try it know".* Furthermore, none of these girls could remember having received any drugs education at school and everything they were learning about drugs seemed to come from other people in social situations.

Sonia, another school 'rebel', had a similar life-story as the 'hyper' girls – her Dad had died and she described her mum's estate as *"a shithole"* – and she also prioritised *"messaging about"* at school because she did not 'fit' into the school. She described herself as 'naughty' rather than 'hyper' but just like Jaz, Nadine and Ruby she *"hated school"* because it was restrictive and punitive towards her (e.g. *"the rules they have here is really a load of shit...the naughty people aren't happy here"*). Sonia actively didn't respond to the school's 'little' incentives aimed at motivating its students (e.g. *"the credits [system] is just like a little stunt and that, they're not really big"*). She also resented the head teacher: *"All she's bothered about is making our school look good, she's not bothered about the kids and that", "[the*

*head] just wants us to be posh and clever and that".* However, unlike how the accounts of the three girls presented above, who had 'found' each other and formed a shared identity in response to their similar unhappy family backgrounds and problems at school, Sonia's accounts *deviated* (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) from the 'hyper' girls in that *she had not formed close bonds with other similar girls at school*. Her style was also less 'girly'/feminine and more 'laddish'. For example, when she discussed some of the *"the old-fashioned man teachers that just shout"* she emphasised that, while *"lots of people are scared of them... I just tell 'em to fuck off!"* She also emphasised that she wasn't *"a slag or nuffin"* when she was drunk which may be suggestive of how she saw – and why she rejected – the behaviour and identity of other groups of girls. Alternatively, hyper-femininity may not be a 'resource' available to all female students.

Although not in the same school 'group' as Jaz, Nadine and Ruby, Sonia also smoked 'weed' before school because *"it's funny when you're stoned – you just laugh and that"*. Sonia had also inhaled 'poppers' *"under the desk and in the toilet"* at school for *"a laugh"* (although she hadn't done it again since she had been 'caught' and excluded for five days). She also reported truanting because she hated school and this was another opportunity to buy 'a tenth' of cannabis and get 'stoned' even though she felt that it was starting to make her *"paranoid about everything"*. She had also tried smoking stronger 'skunk' varieties of 'weed', 'bongs' and cannabis 'joints' mixed with speed and ecstasy with a group of older friends (15-17) she knew out of school. This experimentation with other drugs was similar to Jaz's account of trying 'pills' and 'coke' with older friends and again highlighted how drug use may become more regular and escalate when young people have relatively few incentives not to use drugs – either in the short- or long-term – because they were not particularly worried about the effects it may have on their school work and have few firm plans for life after school. Sonia also thought that it was a relatively natural to progress from *"normal weed"* to 'skunk', 'bongs' and 'mixes' once *"it doesn't affect you as much any more"*. As with the 'hyper' girls, Sonia couldn't remember receiving any drugs education at school.

When I re-interviewed Sonia at the end of Year 10 she had recently been referred to a drugs counselling service by Park Grove after a parent 'grassed' on her for smoking cannabis outside school (although she denied the student they had seen smoking cannabis was actually her *on that specific occasion*). She reported that the deputy head teacher had told her she had a 'drugs problem' and she was 'obviously' going to end up being a 'crack-head' unless she started to attend one-to-one sessions with a drugs counsellor. She was told that it was up to her whether she attended, because they couldn't make her, but if she didn't attend she would be *"permanently excluded by the school governors"*. Although reluctant at first (but with little choice unless she wanted to be excluded!), she reflected that the counsellor – who came into school to see her once a week during term-time – had been helpful and that she had given her some useful *"strategies to stop her smoking weed"*, such as *"this tea thing*



*you drink before you go to bed so don't smoke spliff". At the end of Year 10 she had stopped smoking cannabis (for the time being at least) although she joked about how she was now just drinking more big bottles of Lambreeni wine instead:*

*Adam: Are you still hanging round with the same people since you stopped smoking weed.*

*Sonia: Yeah and they all still get stoned and that – I just drink more now! [laughing]*

*Adam: How much more?*

*Sonia: Like an extra bottle [of Lambreeni] – like before I used to have – er no, when I used to get stoned I smoked cannabis – obviously! – but now I get drunk instead so I get drunk more often...*

*Adam: Do you ever miss getting stoned?*

*Sonia: Yeah but I can stop for now – I don't have to do it.*

It appeared that Sonia had been given considerably more support and 'chances' than other students and that she had responded reasonably positively – despite the attitude of the deputy head who labelled her a future 'crack-head' – and she was, at least, still attending mainstream school. Her head of year commented that the schools approach seemed to have worked in this case: *"she was warned that if she did it [smoking cannabis] again she would be permanently excluded and she did actually do it again but it was not quite on the school site [and] she had made improvements in school – [compared to] before [when] she was just going downhill – and she was also going to [drugs counselling] frequently and so, obviously we did not let her off the hook, but we didn't permanently exclude her because we did not think that would be beneficial for her and she would end up going to a school where maybe there was more access to drugs and then it wouldn't be beneficial".* It may be that the school's attitude was different towards Sonia (compared to Jaz and Nadine) because she was seen as a relatively isolated 'naughty' student (like Ruby after Jaz and Nadine had left the school) and was therefore less likely to instigate group-level disruption and lower overall levels of attainment.

### **"I'm just a typical mixed race girl": girls and gangs in London**

Like Sonia's account, the following student's account further illustrates how students who don't find the social belonging and support they want in school may find greater belonging and status through 'risky' *out-of-school friendships* and, in turn, be at significant risk of drug-related harm. This student's 'story' also provides the opportunity to explore the role of ethnicity as well as gender in constraining young people's actions. **Mel** described herself as 'mixed race': her mum and Grandma were *"traditional white English"* and her dad, who she didn't see, was black. She had been at Park Grove since Year 7, although she had moved away from the 'local estate' to a *"much nicer area"* in Year 8 when her mum re-married. She stressed that she was still *"normal... I'm not high but I'm not low social class"*. She said that Park Grove was 'scary' when she started because all her friends from primary school had gone to other secondary schools. She said that she had initially found her 'place' at school

with a 'group' of black and 'mixed race' girls in her school-year. At the start of Year 10, when I first interviewed Mel, she felt 'safe' at school and she was motivated to 'get down to her work' and do well in her GCSEs:

Adam: *Do you feel safe here then?*

Mel: *I think it is quite a safe school 'cos they have low tolerance. People don't come to school scared that they are going to get their money jacked or get beaten up by the older kids. I don't think anyone is too scared to come to school. [...] It is strict and they do take bullying seriously. They think students should come to school to learn. I think seventy-five of us, our last year elevens got er, was it an A to, a B was it, or an A-star, anyway really good grades for 75 per cent of the kids or something. They did good. [...] at Park Grove you never really see fights, maybe once in a blue moon and people say 'your schools so boring' but it's good and better, people love sending their kids here it's a really good school [...]*

Adam: *Do you get on well with the teachers here?*

Mel: *I get on well with some of them! I've noticed that if you're good you get on better with them. When I was in year eight and year nine I was in loads of trouble – governors and everything – and the teachers were real strict, picking up on it, looking at everything I was doing. I thought I was getting picked on. Now I'm in year ten I've started behaving more and stopped being as naughty and teachers are a lot calmer, more laid back with you. I don't have problem with them anymore.*

Adam: *Is there something about certain teachers that means you either get on with them or don't get on with?*

Mel: *The ones I didn't get on with were the ones that I thought were always picking on me, the ones I did get on with were more laid back. I don't like teachers who are like, 'do this, do that, do this, do that, tuck in your shirt'. I was like leave me alone. It gets me in a bad mood. That used to ruin my day. Now I come in my shirts tucked in and I do my work and my whole day is more positive.*

Adam: *How would the teachers describe you now?*

Mel: *Big changes from year nine! [laughing]*

Adam: *How would they have described you then?*

Mel: *Destructive, erm loud, naughty, doesn't like to listen, doesn't turn up to detention, doesn't do her school work, unfocussed... all them stuff and I know 'cos I was doing it. There is nothing really bad they could say now though 'cos I've changed. Maybe a bit unfocussed or destructive sometimes but big changes.*

Adam: *Why did you change?*

Mel: *I think I just got down to work for year ten. You go to school for like years of your life and so why mess it up for the most important two years. Also, what I want to do when I'm older I need to put my head down now and do good work.*

Adam: *What's that?*

Mel: *Psychologist – so I need good qualifications.*

Adam: *What do you expect to get at the end of year eleven?*

Mel: *I hope to get GCSEs. Not that are brilliant like A-stars all the way round 'cos that's too much but just some I'm happy with and so I've got something to show for going to school all these years. Otherwise there would be no point coming into school.*

In Year 10 she was finding GCSE coursework projects difficult and 'stressful' and welcomed being able get additional support from the teachers: "when you have fifteen-hundred words of coursework thrown on you it can be quite stressful and some people can't cope with it.



*The other week I was like I can't do it and then my teacher helped. That will cause stress for everyone in year ten unless they get help from the teachers". Her mum and Grandma were keen for her to do well and she had a lot of 'respect' for them: "they push education... they say do your homework, revise, don't go out every night...when I get a good grade they are happy". She was keen to distinguish herself from the 'hyper ones' whose parents 'don't care' so they 'skip' school and "go steal mascara from Boots and all that and act like complete hood-rats blazing all the time". However, she admitted that, although her behaviour had improved she got still in trouble at school for being over an hour late some mornings and 'chatting' in class, although the threat of further 'internal exclusion' was clearly a strong deterrent:*

*Adam: What happens if you're late then?*

*Mel: Last week right I came in late one morning and got internal exclusion all day.*

*Adam: What's an internal exclusion?*

*Mel: Just sit in a room all day on your own.*

*Adam: What does that feel like?*

*Mel: It's mad, crazy. It makes you feel like you're going mad when you're in the room all day. When you go to get your lunch downstairs you have a staff with you all the time and you can't say hi to your friends or anything so you're completely isolated on your own, and really boring.*

*Adam: Does it work?*

*Mel: Yeah I suppose it does work 'cos it's so boring. You don't want to be on your own so you let someone else stand up and be a clown [but also] I think it makes peoples feel a lot of hate, I think. I do not like teachers and I used to switch. I used to give 'em dirty looks – like thanks for keeping me in there, I really do not like you. Some students just want revenge for keeping them so bored! They'll be worse than they already were for sure [...] you can get internally excluded in this school easily now.*

Mel didn't smoke (*"I haven't even tried one cigarette, you know"*, she explained) even though *"nearly every single one"* of her friends – both in and out of school – smoked. She didn't like the smell of cigarettes and she said thought that *"it doesn't look nice, it looks like, err, very tacky when you see like a thirteen year old girl smoking"*. According to Mel, it was *"just a reputation thing"* for some 'dumb' girls at school who thought it made them look *"hard or rude or like you're some kind of nex [bad] person if you smoke"*. She explained her own position: *"I think it shows your intelligence though if you have friends who smoke and you don't to join in"*. Although she occasionally drank alcopops, such as Bacardi Breezers, she didn't like to get drunk and 'hated' being around 'drunken kids' at parties. When I first interviewed Mel she was also determined that she was not going to be influenced to start 'blazing' and that she was *"her own person"* although she could easily *"get hold of weed"*. Furthermore, when discussing smoking, drinking and drug use she always appeared to identify certain behaviours with certain 'types' of students. For example, when discussing the different 'groups' of students she could identify in her Year at Park Grove: *"This isn't one of the schools where you see all the white kids and black kids all mixed up [...] there is the sporty*

*white boys, with a few black boys and mixed race like, then there is like the rude little white girls who smoke, take drugs and go out on the weekend and drink and that until they drop on the floor!"*

When I re-interviewed Mel at the end of Year 10, although her mum was apparently still *"really into [her] doing well at school and that"*, she had lost her personal motivation to 'do well' at school during Year 10, 'slipping back' into her old ways, and she didn't 'really care' about her GCSEs or how this might affect her in the future:

- Mel: I was really better at the beginning [of Year 10], gooder than I am now but now we're getting to the end of year ten I'm like kind of getting a bit restless and tired and I'm kind of slipping up right back now. Before I was quite good [at the beginning of Year 10], in year eight and year nine I was terrible.*
- Adam: So why do you think you are slipping back again?*
- Mel: 'Cos I can't be bothered, I just can't be bothered with school anymore – this school, it's not like normal schools where they make it more exciting. They are just like, 'do this essay, do this essay...'*
- Adam: How are you doing in terms of the marks at the moment then?*
- Mel: Erm, on my national curriculum, I'm meeting my national curriculum*
- Adam: So you are doing OK –*
- Mel: Yeah. I think I got a D in science 'cos when we had a mocks exam but I beat my national curriculum 'cos they all expected me to get an E or something.*
- Adam: What do you mean you beat your national curriculum?*
- Mel: Well basically they look at how we done in Yr 6 [final year of primary school] and in our SATs and then national curriculum people and that out of school they give you like a target mark what you should get. If you beat that then you are over your national curriculum, if you don't beat that – say you were like given a D and your national curriculum was an A – and you're under your national curriculum mark then that's when they start to worry, concerns and that.*
- Adam: OK – but that might be quite a low expectation, like just getting an E or above?*
- Mel: I know – they didn't give me really good marks to be honest! I'm actually quite angry 'cos I'm in Foundation now and the highest mark you can get is a C I think [...] I don't think there should be a foundation personally.*
- Adam: When did they put you in the Foundation classes?*
- Mel: Middle of year ten.*
- Adam: And you're angry?*
- Mel: Well in a way yeah but in another way I don't really care what I get now to be honest. I have no care in the world of school no more, I just don't care what I get. Everyone here is so like, 'I can't get a D, I can't get a D'. If I get a D I get a D, if I get an F I get an F... it doesn't matter.*
- Adam: What you think you're going to get in your GCSE's?*
- Mel: At the way I'm going now – I don't really do coursework or anything – I dunno.*
- Adam: How many do think you'll get?*
- Mel: I'll be lucky if I get three probably!*
- Adam: How many GCSEs do you want to get?*
- Mel: Ermm... I dunno, I really don't know 'cos I don't really want to be like a teacher or a doctor or nothing. Like me and all my friends we go to studios and we sing and we MC in studio now and that what we*



*really want to. That's what we do and you don't need any qualifications to that –*

Like the 'hyper' girls her aspirations appeared to be have been constrained by the schools 'targets' and policy of streaming students for all subjects. Furthermore, the schools response to Mel 'slipping back' was to implement *further targets* for her to meet via a managerial-style programme of personal support. She had gone onto a 'personal support plan' (or 'PSP') at school, which meant the head of Year 10 set her three targets: (1) organisation (*"that's just make sure you've got all your planners, pens and that"*); (2) *"punctuality to lessons"*; and (3) *"politeness to teachers"*. Using classroom teachers 'entries' about Mel on the computer system, these targets were reviewed every month by her head of year, her tutor and a *"school counsellor, organiser person...she's a pastoral support woman from [the LEA]"*. She expected to stay on 'report' and this process appeared to have re-enforced her low expectations.

Mel identified herself more closely with 'anti-school' groups of students by the end of Year 10 and she seemed more aware of her ethnicity as source of belonging and identity. Now she was in all the 'foundation sets' she was hanging out with all *"mouthy ones who'll fight and get in trouble"*. *"You know, you'll see all the mouthy black girls on one table [in the canteen]...I'm just with them now"*. However, although she was 'with them' in school she also disliked the 'two-facedness' of lots of her friends at school, considered herself to be more mature and had a different 'group' outside school. Like Sonia, she had found greater belonging and status with non-school friends. She initially told me that her mates were 'really bad' and went on to explain more about her identity and friendships outside school at the end of Year 10, and how this related to her ethnicity:

- Adam: *Who are you hanging out with at the moment outside school then?*  
Mel: *Oh – well we are like a group, we do call ourselves a group, we are a group – the light skinned angels.*  
Adam: *The what?*  
Mel: *The light skinned angels – we are really bad. Basically it used to be all girls my complexion, like light skinned girls [...] We are connected to [a notorious north London 'crew'] now 'cos they have girls now. Before it was boys only, only boys. Now it's girls as well.*  
Adam: *So you're like linked to them?*  
Mel: *Yeah and there's about two-hundred in that, girls as well.*  
Adam: *What does it mean to be in that group then?*  
Mel: *We'll, we like make productions, we go to studios, MC'ing, we make tunes...*  
Adam: *But in the newspapers all you hear about these gangs is violence and shootings and those sort of things – is that not true?*  
Mel: *Well it is – we was in the newspapers too.*  
Adam: *What for?*  
Mel: *A stabbing – I wasn't involved, I was sleeping then they all called me and they were like, 'oh [gang member name] just shanked [stabbed] some boy' and this and that. I called him and he was like yeah. He got caught though. He didn't stab him to kill them though, he just stabbed him to warn him, like shut him up.*

Mel had a pink 'tooth crystal' to indicate her affiliation to the gang – *"it's pink for the girls, the boys have red ones"* – which she thought *"looked nice"* as well as being a 'symbol'. She had attached the 'crystal' to her tooth herself at home with *"special glue"* and this was apparently popular because it's much less painful, expensive and permanent than getting a tattoo. As she formed a strong sense of identity *outside of school* she may have had even less in common with other students at Park Grove. She reported that she 'loved' being 'part' of a 'gang' and she was *"never at home [anymore]... it's too quiet I like the hype now, I like the beefs"*. A few days before my second interview with Mel two school-age teenagers had been shot dead in London in gang-related 'beefs', which had attracted considerable media attention. Mel was keen to tell me *"what really happened"* and let me know that she 'knew someone who knew someone' involved in these 'beefs'. She also explained that she wanted to enjoy herself while she was young: *"I'm getting older by the minute so you've got to go out and have fun while you can before I'm like thirty and having kids and that – at least I'm not like pregnant and that. I don't shoot no-one or stab no-one or anything like that so I don't put anyone in any serious harm"*. Mel had a boyfriend who was also in a gang in south London – *"he's well-known to the police, well-know to everyone round his area"* – and this was apparently an advantage because *"if you have a boyfriend you don't have to have all the links and it's less confusing, some girls are confused 'cos they have like twenty-five boys"*. In other words, it gave her somewhere to 'stand', as she put it. She also considered that it was much 'safer' to be a girl in a gang in London than a boy. Her lifestyle and image focussed around singing, MC'ing, recording music and going to 'raves' on a weekend, rather than substance misuse, violence or 'hustling money'. However, she recognised that drug use and drug-dealing were also prominent in teenage gangs:

- Adam: Are there many people using drugs, like smoking cannabis, among these gangs – it must be quite normal?
- Mel: Yeah it's really normal, everyone does it and everyone shots it [sell it].
- Adam: Like hustling extra money?
- Mel: Yeah, it's like, just sell it. Like they sell white, purples, greens
- Adam: What's that?
- Mel: Whites [cocaine] is for sniffing, purples is pills, green is weed – that's not bad though weed. It doesn't matter if you sell weed [...] a lot of the girls stash the stuff but my cousin said to me never do that 'cos you'll get the blame so I never do that. I just don't. The people I hang round with don't ask me anyway 'cos I'm still quite young [14]. Smoking weed isn't a big deal though. It's not like the kids from this school who blatantly smoke it on the way back from school. I might smoke it but usually I don't be honest.
- Adam: What do think it says if you don't then?
- Mel: It says I'm mature like. My friends kind of rate me for that I think 'cos I don't do really it [...] At the end of the day – I am a stereotypical mixed race girl, I hang out with black people, go out on a weekend, do this, do that but I don't really care what people thing. I dunno, it's like with some of the white community maybe it's like if you don't smoke you're a bit gay, you're a bit dumb, you're frigid blah blah blah if you don't smoke or drink. With the black community I



*don't think it's such a big deal and that, 'cos you're part of something bigger.*

Mel hadn't had any drugs education "*since Primary school*" and she was therefore mainly learning about drugs on the 'streets'. When I challenged her to tell me about any risks which she thought were associated with cannabis use she couldn't think of anything in particular other than that weed "*can be bad and addictive sometimes*". In terms of drugs *other than cannabis*, she told me that she thought anyone who used 'pills' or 'white' [cocaine] was just a "*crack-head*" and that "*when you do loads of drugs like that you like you go a different colour and get loads of spots*". Although Mel's occasional cannabis use was likely to be relatively unproblematic her general ignorance about any of the health harms associated with drug use was concerning, especially in the context of her access to illegal drugs. Above all, Mel's account of her life, aged 14, exemplified how quickly young people can find *alternatives* to education when they become disengaged from school and have low expectations for the future.

### **Anti-school but pro-education: 'getting your head down'**

It would be an oversimplification to present Park Grove school as divided between 'naughty', 'hyper' female students who hate school and 'don't care' and all the other groups of girls who liked all aspects of school-life. Both the female students who were selected randomly from the Year 10 register, Kimberley and Mary Ann, were critical of some of the school's policies and practices. For example, like the other girls, they felt that the rules about school uniform were 'too strict' and that some teachers were 'too moany' and could 'pick on you'. For both of these students the point of school was to get 'good marks' in their GCSEs (e.g. "*I want to get all C's and above*") and they clearly accepted the school's message that this was imperative for going on to further education and getting a 'good job'. Therefore, even if some aspects of school were like a 'prison' at times, they chose to 'do their time', looking forward to greater freedom in the future. For instance, Kimberley accepted "*lots of strict rules*" even if she didn't like them and she wouldn't give the teachers any 'attitude' even if she would rather have her "*own say*". In other words, they perceived school as a *means to an end* and chose to get their 'head down'. This alternative to disruptive and blatant anti-school responses has been described in other studies as a more 'pragmatic' response (Sewell, 1997) and such female students have been termed 'pro-education but anti-school' (Fuller, 1984).

Although their families' backgrounds were different – Kimberley's family heritage was Afro-Caribbean, Mary Ann was from a white, working-class family – in both cases their parents worked full-time (often leaving them with some of the 'caring' and 'housework' roles). Furthermore, in both cases, their parents would take an active interest in their education, they knew several of their teachers and 'pushed' them to do well at school. This further highlights the interaction between both family and school 'rules' and 'resources'. Previous

studies (Fuller, 1984; Sewell, 1997) suggested that more 'pragmatic' responses to school reflect students' family values towards education which also appeared to be the case here. Mary Ann explained that, *"[her parents] like look through my planner and stuff [...] when I get home they say like 'how was school today?'"*. Kimberley told me that, *"my parents always say education is the key to everything so I have to get my marks high"*. It also appeared that these students were more 'pragmatic' in terms of their friendship groups – and less concerned about having a 'group' of 'close' friends with a clear, shared identity – as they prioritised 'learning' and doing well in school. Kimberley explained, *"I have got friends at school but at the moment it's really the case that I go to school to learn. I mix around a lot with different people [...] I don't just think about meeting up with people everyday, it's just people who you see at school and get on with"*.

In Year 10 Kimberley and Mary Ann hadn't smoked either cigarettes or cannabis and they also both drank in a more 'sensible' way than other, more 'hyper' girls. Mary Ann emphasised that she did *"know limits"* and didn't get 'legless'. Kimberley admitted getting 'tipsy' at parties but she was also determined to make sure that I didn't think she was *"one of those teenagers who drink out on the street and act stupid, don't know what they are doing and regret what they are doing after"*. Mary Ann had tried 'weed' *"a couple of times"* with her friends when she was in Year 9 but she *"didn't really like the feeling of it"* and she had observed the effects that 'blazing' had on other girls at school which also put her off: *"they get all drowsy and stuff and their eyes go funny...all small and red"*. Kimberley couldn't understand why students who smoked cannabis were *"like that"* and put it down a lack of 'self-esteem' and 'ambition':

Adam: Have you ever tried using any drugs?

Kimberley: No, the only drug I'd ever have is nurofen!

Adam: Have any of your friends?

Kimberley: Yeah, one of my friends at school smoked weed but she's kind of a Ho' [slag]...to be honest I don't really know much about drugs – I just know about pills and that.

Adam: Where do people get them from?

Kimberley: I don't have a clue and to be honest I don't really care!

Adam: What do you think about other student's who take drugs then?

Kimberley: Same as smoking and drinking – they're just all in their state of mind, they must have low self-esteem and not be very ambitious if they take drugs.

Both Kimberley and Mary Ann appeared to look down on the minority of the 'bad' girls at Park Grove who had 'attitude' and whom they thought used drugs to look 'big' and 'cool'. For example, Kimberley described them as *"normally white girls"* and thought they were *"slags who just go out with everyone and that, they are just nasty"*. At Park Grove these pragmatic, pro-education students almost certainly outnumbered the more disaffected, 'naughty' and 'hyper' students and therefore Kimberley and Mary Ann may represent the attitudes and actions of a wide range of the female students in Year 10 at Park Grove. They 'belonged' at



this school and could identify with most students in their Year just by 'consuming' education and striving for academic success. By blaming and disrespecting other students who didn't prioritise learning at school, and found an alternative identity through 'blazing' and other 'bad' behaviours (e.g. 'bunking'), they appeared to reinforce these students marginal position at the school and therefore, along with the staff and school practices, helped to make sure that any anti-school students can only ever 'partially penetrate' the institution and continue to 'fail themselves' (Willis, 1977).

### The 'football lads': "we're the top people"

Working-class 'lads' at Park Grove School appeared to be able to find a common culture through football and the opportunity it afforded them to emphasise their masculinity and to achieve status other than through academic work. Two of the students I interviewed – Carl and Kieran – were recruited to the study because they were considered to be *less engaged* than the majority of their peers. At school they identified themselves as 'football lads', which appeared to provide them with a symbolic basis for their friendships and identity. Carl (white British) was fourteen when I first interviewed him and he lived with his mum, who didn't work, and his younger sister on a housing estate in North London. He was entitled to free school meals but he didn't seem particularly aware of his low socio-economic status compared to some other students. He described everyone at Park Grove as "*just normal social class*". Carl explained what it meant to be one of the 'football lads' at Park Grove:

- Adam: *What sort of image do you reckon you have then?*  
Carl: *Like – I dunno – one of the top people in my Year. One of the people, people look up to, me and my mates.*  
Adam: *Tell me about your group of friends here then.*  
Carl: *There is quite a few of us.*  
Adam: *What a group of lads?*  
Carl: *Yeah [...]*  
Adam: *What you do normally do?*  
Carl: *Play football, hang about at lunch [...]*  
Adam: *And do you all try hard at school?*  
Carl: *What do you mean in, in lessons an' stuff?*  
Adam: *Yeah.*  
Carl: *Er – average innit. Sort of mess about a bit.*  
Adam: *Is everyone from similar estates?*  
Carl: *No it's a mixture.*  
Adam: *And a mixture of differ ethnic backgrounds – are there black lads here you knock about with?*  
Carl: *Yeah.*  
Adam: *So what is it you've all got in common then?*  
Carl: *Football and messing around I suppose.*

Kieran was from a large black African family and lived on a 'rough' housing estate: "*about two month ago someone got stabbed there, and there are druggies, dealers hanging out everywhere*". Kieran's status as one of the 'football lads' afforded him an alternative to the black Hip Hop, 'gangster' stereotypes:

- Adam: *Do you identify at all with the gangster-type groups?*  
 Kieran: *No – sometimes it can be jokes and that but sometimes it's annoying*  
 Adam: *Do some people think of you like that?*  
 Kieran: *Yeah. Just 'cos I'm black really. It's like when they say, 'Kieran broth what you sayin' and that – I'm like 'sssh it gets on my nerves', then they're like 'what broth, what broth?'*  
 Adam: *I take it that's not how you talk then?*  
 Kieran: *No! They're all like 'safe, safe' and that...and it's like yeah I feel safe!*

In addition to their interest in playing football, Carl and Kieran shared similar attitudes to school. They disliked lots of the lessons and seemed alienated by the curriculum (e.g. *"I hate English, the subject is boring and I find it hard, the Shakespeare – I don't understand a word he says or find it interesting. I just don't like it – I hated Romeo and Juliet"*). Carl told me that he was happy to be interviewed because it was *"better than being in a lesson"*. Their behaviour and 'style' at school seemed to be symbolic of their *non-academic* status: 'talking' and 'messing about' in class; 'play' fighting; having their shirts untucked after playing football. Although they had positive relationships with some teachers (e.g. *"I like having a few jokes and that and then you think even though he's a bit bad he's OK. Then you talk to them sometimes"*), they felt that most of the teachers were 'too strict', 'picky' and 'unfair' to them (and their mates). Both Carl and Kieran often got in trouble with the teachers. The second time I interviewed Carl he was on a 'report card' to monitor his behaviour but he wasn't about to change significantly because of a 'bit of paper':

- Carl: *I'm on the report now.*  
 Adam: *What does that mean?*  
 Carl: *It's like, erm it's like er ... I'm on it for uniform, being late to lesson and behaviour in class – like focus in class [...] it's just like a bit of paper that you have to give to miss.*  
 Adam: *What do you have to do then?*  
 Carl: *You just have to like reach your target things – it's like A,B,C or D. And on the report it's like, for focus in lessons 100 per cent is an A, 75 per cent is a B, C is 50 per cent, under fifty is D [...]*  
 Adam: *Do you think it's helpful to be on it?*  
 Carl: *Not really!*  
 Adam: *Are you trying harder now you're on it?*  
 Carl: *Well maybe but I'm still the same person.*

In other words, Carl was still going to 'mess about' at school and actively construct his identity as one of the 'top lads'. However, although being on a 'report card' didn't worry these 'lads', this is not to say that they did not ever worry about the *power* of school to punish and undermine them. For instance, the threat of 'isolation' concerned them because it directly prevented them from playing football and having fun with their friends. Kieran explained, *"You may as well stay at home on your own all day playing computer if you're going to have sit in a room on your own all day"*. Therefore the school regime, and the sanctions it had at its disposal, may have helped deter blatant anti-school/'bad' behaviour. The threat of exclusion also seemed to motivate these students to keep up with their work. Kieran told me,



*"I know people who had good grades and then they go down and then end up getting excluded. It's just one wrong move in this school – they are tough."*

Although Kieran had tried smoking and they both knew people who smoked, got drunk regularly and smoked 'weed', both Carl and Kieran actively rejected smoking, drinking and drug use during Year 10. Firstly, they prioritised their health more than the other students I interviewed at Park Grove and this appeared to relate to their 'sporty' lifestyles as the 'football lads'. Secondly, they also rejected the identity of other students, such as the 'little hooligans' and 'stupid girls', who smoked. Both Carl and Kieran also not only avoided 'binge' drinking but they did not *"want to drink at all"*. They were both aware of the *health risks* associated with drinking but they were also equally aware of how they might lose their 'top status' if they got 'pissed' and did something they regretted. In other words, they appeared to avoid these substances because of the implications they had in terms of fitness and sporting prowess but also because sporting prowess was itself an alternative to both academic work and substance use for achieving status and forming their identity and friendships. Reviewing the literature on adolescent school social networks and substance use, John Cotterell (2007) has also suggested that smoking has traditionally been a less important marker of 'group membership' for non-academic boys than girls because the former are more likely to be involved with sports which can also be an alternative marker of status.

They both saw clear links between drug use and people's identity in terms of how *attractive* they were and how *successful* they were going to be in the future and wanted to differentiate themselves from these students (even Carl's choice of a Labrador dog appeared to be a way of actively differentiating himself from *"people with staffs and pit-bulls"* who smoke and 'shot' [sell] drugs!). It was sport – especially football – which provided these 'lads' with a masculine 'resource' rather than substance use. They both thought that cannabis was 'disgusting' and talked about the 'dopey girls' at Park Grove who publicly smoked cannabis to stand out:

*Kieran: I don't like people who smoke cannabis like down alleys and in the woods.*

*Adam: Why?*

*Kieran: 'Cos of how they are and how they act.*

*Adam: What do you mean by that?*

*Kieran: Just being hyper in school – they always talk and have a laugh in school. Some mornings they look rough and you can tell they have had drugs. They don't look tidy man! [...] I think now their minds are focussed on drugs and not on school. Some of them don't care about what they want to do after school. All they want to do is smoke and get high. They don't think about where they're going to get money from.*

Finally, in addition to their shared identity at school and active rejection of substance use, another similarity between these 'football lads' was that that they appeared to be unprepared for life *after school*. Although Carl was motivated to get a 'good job' he admitted he didn't

have a 'clue' about what he was going to do after he left school (other than a very vague idea that he would *"probably go college"*) or what job he would like to have. He hadn't had any formal careers advice. Kieran seemed to only identify with relatively unattainable jobs with 'celebrity' status, such as being a footballer or actor:

Adam: *What do you want to do [when you leave school]?*

Kieran: *I would like to be a professional footballer.*

Adam: *Have you had trials?*

Kieran: *I had trials for this Middlesex team but I didn't get in. Our coach isn't bothered no more. He just lets us play games – he doesn't send us to trials. He just probably likes us playing football here. If I don't make it I maybe do something else but I think I would. Maybe not for Chelsea but for Watford or Reading.*

Adam: *So you just play loads of football at the moment basically?*

Kieran: *I was also thinking about drama – I don't really get how it goes though. People I ask don't really know. When I asked my sister, you send a picture or you gotta get an agency or some'it like that. First you've got to go to drama school, then if they've got your picture and they've got the right part then you've got to act. I don't think there is that stuff round here?*

Adam: *Does anyone talk to you about careers?*

Kieran: *My friend Dan does.*

Adam: *What about the teachers though?*

Kieran: *What do you mean?*

Adam: *Like talk to you about what you might do after you've left school?*

Kieran: *My PE teacher does and my form tutor sometimes does. My old art teachers did. They say what do you want to do if you don't make it as a footballer?*

Adam: *Do you find that helpful?*

Kieran: *Not really!*

The transition to adulthood is certainly more uncertain for these lads than it was thirty years ago for Willis' *proto-workers*. Apprenticeships for school-leavers and 'working-class jobs' were widely available then and Willis' 'lads' normally had access to their own networks – their dad or uncle or brother who could 'have a word with the guv'nor'. Carl, Kieran and the other 'football lads' at Park Grove won't just 'walk into a job', regardless of whether unemployment remains relatively low in London, and they are aware of this. Of course, 'macro' social, economic and cultural changes lie beyond the controls of schools, however, one of the teachers admitted that, at the same time, secondary schools now did little (or nothing) to prepare students for anything other than their GCSEs:

*"There's a good sixth form college up the road although the entry requirements are quite tough and I must admit that I assumed because of all the plaudits this school gets and what a top-notch school it's supposed to be – on value-added we do brilliantly – but, er, I must admit I don't know what we really do to help students progress after school, especially in terms of vocational course and things like that. I admit I couldn't tell you what the students get out of the school in the long-term".*

There are few incentives for a school (and in particular a head teacher) to do anything about this because they are predominantly 'assessed' and 'rated' according to students' attainment



when they *leave* school and not what do they do after. This means that although these lads are actively rejecting drug use while at secondary school their pathways to work and their 'long-term' identity is uncertain.

### Black and 'mixed race' boys at Park Grove: Jerome and Duke

Although Kieran was comfortable with his identity as a black-African 'football lad' and was actively avoiding elements of the school culture associated with 'gangster' boys, other black and 'mixed race' students appeared to form close friendships based on their ethnic and cultural heritage. Two such students were Jerome and Duke who were identified by the teachers as having been in trouble 'on and off' since Year 8. They wore some of the same mainstream sportswear and fashion labels as the football lads (e.g. Nike, Adidas, Kangol, etc.) and Duke explained that they had much more in common with "*casual wear [football] lads*" than the "*grungies with their long hair*". However, they also adopted specific styles and symbols often associated with Hip Hop culture, such as low-slung, baggy trousers, work-style boots and 'bling' jewellery. Hip Hop fashion originated in New York in the 1970s and 1980s and it's a now prominent part of popular fashion across the world for young people of *all* ethnicities. However, Jerome and Duke seemed to have adopted this style to reinforce their shared interest in, and identity with, 'black culture'. Jerome described what they had in common and the image of the 'black and mixed race group' at Park Grove:

Adam: *How would you describe the different groups of students here?*

Jerome: *I've noticed in this school there is mixed race [and] blacks – cos I'm born mixed race in a white area I know a lot of white kids – and at this school I've noticed the groups are more black and mixed race, and then white. I've been put in this black mixed race group 'cos of the way of our personalities are. We seem to be able to talk to each other much easier. Have ideas about different things – different from the white kids. [...] I wouldn't say we're badder but we just seem, like, there is the black culture and the white culture – and we seem to know a bit more about the black culture, like music, proper raves, stuff like that. I've been brought up with a lot of white friends, I've noticed the white kids are bit a different, they like football and that – I am friends with them as well though.*

Adam: *OK – Do you think the teachers look at students divided like that?*

Jerome: *Right – I wouldn't say they are racist – but they do look at us like the troublemakers. I'll admit that we do sometimes cause a bit of trouble.*

Adam: *How would the teachers describe you and your mates if I asked them then?*

Jerome: *Surly, rowdy, loud ones.*

Adam: *Is that fair?*

Jerome: *I think we've all our different, um, ways – how we're going behave.*

A recurring theme from the interviews with teachers at Park Grove was the *low expectations* which they had for the boys who were in the 'Hip Hop crowd' and they associated with 'gangster' cultures. They described these students as 'difficult' and 'confrontational' at school. A head of department at the school thought that "*some of black boys unfortunately*

*just want to be pimps and drug dealers. They know the kids from [the local estates] three or four years ahead of them, who are the local drug dealer, who drive round in a Merc and they want that".* A senior member of staff blamed the lack of 'positive role-models' for these students, *"[they] imitate stereotypical American black rapper styles and behaviour, you know their voices turn American when they are answering teachers back... there aren't as many successful role-models for these kids as there are negative role-models though to be honest".* Another teacher admitted that one of the reasons he preferred this school compared to his previous school was because the *"the American mirror group"* – *"it's Hip Hop, anything rap, anything gangster, basically anything with attitude"* – was relatively small and 'manageable' at Park Grove.

Having grown up in a predominantly 'white area' and attending a school dominated (numerically at least) by 'white kids', Jerome was expressing his identity as a young, black man and this identity seemed to create problems with the teachers at Park Grove school: *"I feel as if personally I get picked out at this school"*. Jerome admitted that *he* made own his decisions and that he could be 'bad' at school, however, what he really disliked was the teachers trying to *change* his behaviour. As he put it, *"if I want to do bad I'll do bad, if I want to do good I do good, they are trying to force me to much I don't like that"*. It appeared that the school would not accommodate certain masculine postures and the more Jerome tried to actively and creatively define himself the more the school appeared to punish and exclude him from classes which, in turn, seem to further strengthen his perception of *unfairness* at school.

*Jerome: There are some rules I don't like – that could change. Like the isolation room. There is a room like this small – put your arms out like that [approx. 2 metres sq.]. You have to sit in there for a whole day. Now if my dad was to do that for me then he wouldn't really be allowed to do that and I could complain to the police about that-*

*Adam: -or social services.*

*Jerome: Yeah, you get me.*

*Adam: So that is what is known as internal exclusion here?*

*Jerome: Yeah.*

*Adam: Have you been internally excluded before then?*

*Jerome: Yeah! [...] Sometimes you just sit there all day on your own, sometimes they even forget to get you at lunch and I ain't doing it no more [...] I can see how you get in trouble but if you want to send someone out you send someone home, not keep them just in a room at school. It makes you more frustrated that they put you in there [...] I actually can't cope. I actually end up – if it happens to me again I'll walk out. You can't do nothing. Oh I hate it [...] [the rooms] are down there... with a table and chair in there. I don't see how that works.*

While carrying out the fieldwork at Park Grove I observed other boys, some even younger than Jerome, who were being 'internally excluded' in small rooms, sometimes with no windows. I saw one boy crying and banging his head on the desk repeatedly while sat in 'isolation'. I heard another boy *pleading* with a senior member of staff not to go into 'isolation'



and asking to be given a detention instead. Based on his experiences of these periods of 'isolation', Jerome told me: *"I can't wait to leave school [...] and be more independent"*. By the beginning of Year 10 Jerome felt he had been crudely 'categorised' at Park Grove as a 'naughty one' and was therefore losing motivation.

Adam: *Do you feel part of this school?*

Jerome: *Me myself – I'm drawing myself away. Especially after how my sister was at this school – she got expelled. I think they categorise me and they see me as a naughty one, with all the naughty children. They expect me to be naughty and then every little thing I do they pick me out. Some of the kids get away with it [...] that is why I am drawing away from the school and I don't want to be part of the school.*

Adam: *Do you do any extra-curricular activities at school?*

Jerome: *Yeah I do football [one night a week] but I don't like to really stay at this school, I like to get away.*

Despite these problems at school, Jerome stressed that he did 'care' about school and that he didn't consider himself to be one of the 'really naughty ones'. He also actively rejected smoking 'weed' – even though he had tried cannabis and lots of his older friends did it, especially when *"they are going out to rave"* – because he associated it with a lack of ambition and with the students who 'really didn't care' about their education and long-term future. Even though he was often 'tempted', he didn't do it *"all the time [because] the ones who do actually try and do it on a regular basis, they are the ones who don't pay attention at school and can't wait to get out of school like – always bunking off lessons, stuff like that"*. However, several of the teachers associated the black, 'Hip Hop crowd' with 'smoking weed' and, as one put it, *"being really out of it"* which suggested that certain students may have been misunderstood and *stereotyped* by the teachers. Jerome particularly distanced himself from the most blatant actions associated with the 'hyper' girls: *"They was smoking something the other day – I think it was cannabis – they try and like leave the school premises [...] they don't really care what their ambition is and getting career, how they are going to grow up. Their lives been wasted and they just think make the best of it"*. Jerome also avoided getting drunk although drinking seemed to be constrained by the threat of violence, as well as the image he associated with students who 'drink every weekend':

Adam: *Do you drink much alcohol?*

Jerome: *Yeah but I've never been drunk really.*

Adam: *What do you drink?*

Jerome: *All them rubbish little vodka things and stuff [pre-mixed vodka drinks e.g. Smirnoff ice].*

Adam: *When's that then?*

Jerome: *I dunno, er. At a party I don't actually drink – I have to be curious [about] other guys coming in and seeing what it's like, if there's any fights and that. Just like if we are coming out and it's a group of friends and someone has got a drink then I'll take a bit – nothing big.*

Adam: *Do some people at this school get drunk quite a bit?*

Jerome: *There is a group of girls that drink every weekend [...] there is a woods near my estate and they just go in there and just drink.*

Adam: *What sort of students are they?*

*Jerome: The ones that bunk lessons and don't pay no attention to school whatsoever.*

When I returned to re-interview Jerome in the summer term he had been permanently excluded. It seemed that the relationships between Jerome and the school staff had become increasingly tense and confrontational during Year 10. I tried to contact him at home but relations had further deteriorated between his family and the school following the 'appeal' process and there was no response. Other students suggested that, with his educational opportunities now limited, he would fall in with the 'wrong' crowd'. Kieran, who obviously empathised with Jerome and his friends although he wanted to avoid that identity himself, explained to me what Jerome was doing now and why he had got excluded:

*Kieran: Oh – loads of people have been excluded.  
Adam: Like Jerome?  
Kieran: Yeah – loads of them lot.  
Adam: What's Jerome doing now?  
Kieran: He's on the streets.  
Adam: On the streets?  
Kieran: Just hanging round with the wrong people – you always see him with, you know, bad people. People who look like they carry knives and that.  
Adam: What did he get excluded for?  
Kieran: Threatening a teacher, or a dinner lady maybe – Karen in the canteen I think. He said something – 'I'm gonna deh deh deh' and she took it really bad and she told all the teachers, they took it further and he got excluded for three weeks. When he came back he had like a government trial [a meeting with the school governors] and I don't think that went to plan like [...] he was actually a good student though really. He was quite clever and good at drawing.*

Although Jerome had been excluded in Year 10, one of Jerome 'bloods' [close friends], Duke, was still at Park Grove at the end of Year 10. Duke, a black-African student, joined the school in Yr 8. His identity and behaviour at school were similar to Jerome's when I first interviewed them both at the beginning of the school-year. Duke was also often getting in trouble, getting detentions and he had been sent to see the head to explain his school uniform, record of 'lates' and his 'attitude'. He was especially frustrated at never getting any 'credit' at school: *"They're more hesitant to give you credits than write bad things because the computer [system] isn't really adjusted to writing good notes, only bad ones!"* However, just like Jerome, he differentiated himself from the "worst students" who "just don't really care". He also wanted to do well at school and specifically cited this ambition as a reason for rejecting 'weed'. Despite these similarities between Jerome and Duke at the start of Year 10, when I returned to re-interview them towards the end Year 10 Duke's position was far-removed from Jerome and others who had been excluded:

*Adam: Have you seen many mates get excluded while you've been here?  
Duke: YEAH!  
Adam: What's been the difference then – between you and them?*



Duke: *I think, like before [when I was] in year eight I couldn't really control what I was saying. Over the years I've learnt to keep my mouth shut.*

Adam: *Is that important at this school to keep your mouth shut?*

Duke: *Yeah, you just go through the levels of detentions and exclusions and stuff until you're not here not more.*

Adam: *Have you seen mates who that has happened to?*

Duke: *Yeah-*

Adam: *Who was that?*

Duke: *Martin, Jerome.*

Adam: *OK – I interviewed Jerome before. Do you still see him?*

Duke: *Yeah – walking his dog, he's got one of those Staffs [Staffordshire bull terrier].*

Adam: *Are you quite good mates with him still?*

Duke: *I was really good friends yeah. I see him I still go up to him and talk*

Adam: *Is he at another school now?*

Duke: *No I don't think so...erm...*

Adam: *What happens if you get permanently excluded then?*

Duke: *They told me that school gives them some work to start with and they can apply to come back to the school but if they are rejected think they go some special school with all the other ones who are rejected and that.*

Adam: *A pupil referral unit?*

Duke: *Yeah that's it!*

Duke had not only 'survived' Year 10 but he was more confident about his GCSEs and happier about school-life by the end of the Year: *"I don't really get into [trouble] anymore. I used be worse – start a lot, not give much respect"*. His improved relationships with the teachers were reflected in his willingness to *"stay around [after school] for extra support when he had stuff to hand in"*. He was also more ambitious and was forming clear plans to go to 'good' local sixth form college after school. Although he continued to get in trouble it was *"occasional"* and only for, what he described as, 'play fights'; detentions were the worst punishments he had received during the summer term, rather than any form of 'exclusion'. His 'changed' attitude may have partly been due to seeing other students, such as Jerome, being excluded. However, although they were close friends and both identified themselves with the black and mixed-raced 'Hip Hop crew' at Park Grove, there were two significant differences between Jerome and Duke in terms of their 'resources' which set them apart and these may partly explain their significantly different 'paths' through Year 10.

Firstly, Duke's family had pushed him to do well at school and he was aware that his *"sister has set a little bar for [him] to raise [by going to college]"*. His mum was also providing further incentives for him to do well at school with *"little rewards"*. Jerome, on the other hand, explained that his parents did *not* take a close interest in his schooling and they had difficult, conflicting relationships with the school because of his own experiences at school and his sister's exclusion. He told me that: *"my dad is starting to notice the way they are noticed towards me, he's picked up on it"*. Secondly, Duke's involvement in positive activities outside school may have been important. He was *"doing a lot of boxing outside school"* – about three times a week at a boxing club – when I re-interviewed him at the end of the school-year. However, when black and mixed-race boys have fewer positive, protective influences

they may be marginalised and unhappy at school. These students' 'biographies' suggest that when young people have limited positive 'resources' and sources of belonging and identity *outside of school* they may find it difficult to build positive relationships at schools such as Park Grove where the institutional 'rules' are focussed on raising overall levels of attainment and 'isolating' students who do not 'fit in' to, as one teacher put it, "*the [Park Grove] way of doing things*".

### Indie kids: fitting into the 'alternative' scene

The term *indie* – short for *independent* – has its origins in the mid-1980s when it referred to a style of independently produced music and associated fashions. The contemporary indie scene has become well-known and spread widely beyond its 'DIY' subcultural roots. Two of the students I interviewed – Danny and AJ – had become close friends at Park Grove because they were in the same 'indie group' at school and they both identified themselves within school and the indie-rock scene in London when I interviewed them. If they could 'get in', they went to concerts at popular 'indie' venues such as the Camden Barfly and the Coronet in Elephant & Castle, and they used Myspace to find out about 'gigs' and keep in contact with their friends. The second time I interviewed Danny it was a non-uniform day and he was wearing classic 'indie' brands – Converse All-star trainers and a Fred Perry polo-shirt. Even in their school uniform they clearly distinguished themselves from the majority of students with their 'skinny' trousers, longer hair-styles and 'indie' badges decorating their bags and jackets. Neither of these students was selected *specifically* because they were seen as disengaged. Nonetheless, Danny and AJ both seemed to be actively choosing an alternative, or *independent*, position outside the mainstream and dominant school culture, which they disliked:

Adam: *What you think about this school?*

Danny: *I don't like it.*

Adam: *Why don't you like it?*

Danny: *The students and that... generally I don't really like many people my age and all that, people are trying to be cool and get accepted amongst people and friends and I don't like it [...] they are all just copying each other.*

The indie scene appeared to provide them with an 'off-the-peg', alternative identity irrespective of their social, religious or ethnic background, or their physical size: Danny was from a Jewish family and lived on a low-income housing estate in North London; AJ lived with his mum in a low-income residential area and had dual heritage (white British-Chinese), although he seemed much more aware of being known as 'shorty' than of his parents background. They appeared to occupy separate physical spaces at school (e.g. "*break is boring, so we just sit in the concourse, stuff like that*") which may explain why few of the other students explicitly mentioned the 'indie kids' or 'indie' music when discussing the main 'groups' in their school. They appeared to be happy to stay within the 'core' areas of the

school, such as the canteen, main concourse and ICT rooms, away from more 'hyper' and 'anti-school' student groups who gravitated towards 'peripheral' areas where they had greater freedom to be active and construct their identities in opposition to the school and the teachers, such as on the tennis courts and by the school gates. Although Danny and AJ considered themselves and their friends to be the 'indie kids' and found it relatively easy to fit into an established scene outside school, other groups of students at Park Grove – such as the 'hyper' girls and 'football lads' – were condescending towards any students who preferred 'alternative' music genres, (e.g. 'indie kids', 'emo-kids', 'grungers', 'goths'). The teachers did, however, seem to understand where students such as Danny and AJ were 'coming from' and why they chose this identity. One teacher explained: *"being indie or grungy is in a sense often a reaction against the townies and their tracksuits, and slavish adherence to labels, particularly chavs and ganster ones who are the most violent normally."* Danny explained his position in similar terms:

- Adam: *What is it like when you first arrive here in year seven?*  
 Danny: *I was scared like, it's all the older people trying to intimidate you and stuff. They do it now as well.*  
 Adam: *Why do they do it then?*  
 Danny: *To have power. People like having power over lessons and things. Not like over the lessons but shouting and stuff [...] dominating the other students.*  
 Adam: *What sorts of students are being disruptive then?*  
 Danny: *The ones who are playing football, well not all of them. They just want to intimidate people and have power. Most of them are boys, like same rap music and stuff – violent stuff – and dress the same.*

Like all the other students, Danny and AJ disliked aspects of school-life. In particular, they both complained that it was 'boring'. However, at the start of Year 10 they both accepted the 'official line' about the importance of their GCSEs for future success and they were motivated to 'do well' at school when I first met them. In that sense they were probably in a majority of 'anti-school' but 'pro-education' students at Park Grove and, as the quote above indicates, they resented other students whose behaviour at school was blatantly disruptive to other people's learning and education. As Danny put it when I first interviewed him: *"I know I need GCSEs and that to get a job and live after school. I wanna be a musician but I still need something to fall back on"*. AJ also described how he was motivated in Year 10 by the importance of working towards his GCSE exams:

- Adam: *Have you ever bunked off?*  
 AJ: *Yeah once last year [...] I couldn't be bothered to come in, was too tired. I just stayed at home and watched TV on the sofa [...]*  
 Adam: *Did school find out then?*  
 AJ: *Er. I dunno!*  
 Adam: *OK I won't tell them! Would you do that again?*  
 AJ: *Not this year 'cos the work's more important now. This year is more important than other years and I can't really afford to miss school now.*  
 Adam: *Do many people bunk?*



AJ: *No not this year – people take it more seriously. Last three years wasn't as important.*

When I first interviewed Danny and AJ at the start of Year 10 neither of them had tried smoking either cigarettes or cannabis nor had they ever been 'properly' drunk. Although they did sometimes drink with friends, drinking wasn't routine or a key part of their identity (e.g. *"it's pointless", "I've drunk alcopops...not really alcoholic, just little drinks"*). They both acknowledged that it was relatively easy to obtain drugs, especially cannabis, 'poppers' and 'pills' – either through friends (or 'friends of friends') or by going to areas which are well-populated by 'dealers' where they can buy them (e.g. Camden Town) – but they actively rejected drug use and had strong feelings about other students' drug use (e.g. *"it's retarded", "people just want to be cool..."*). Another 'pro-education' student, Josh – a 'skater' from an financially secure, middle-class family in north London – also held similar attitudes towards groups of *"loud", "rude"* students who used drugs because *"they are not as intelligent"* as him and *"have no money because they take drugs"*.

However, when I returned later in the school-year to interview them again both Danny and AJ had tried smoking for the first time and were getting 'pissed' on cider and 'high' on cannabis regularly at weekends. Above all, this illustrates both how quickly young people 'discover' these activities and how quickly they can become a 'normal' part of their social-lives and routines. Their attitudes had also changed markedly. They no longer thought that people only smoked cannabis because they want to be seen as 'cool' and explained how it was 'jokes' [good fun]. Despite his frank views on teenage drug use during the first round of interviews, unfortunately Josh refused a second interview – because in true 'skater' fashion he told me, *"I can't be bothered"* – so it wasn't possible to explore if his attitudes had also softened.

For Danny and AJ 'spliffs' and cider seemed to further strengthen their indie rock credibility and they both seemed happy with their busy social lives having made new friends at school and outside school through 'gigs'. AJ explained, *"I still hang around with the same people, just, er, ...more"*. This period of, initially, experimentation and then increasing cannabis use coincided with other changes in their lives, particularly in terms of their relationships with their parents and in their attitudes to school. Danny had been arguing more with his mum, both about going out to gigs and about getting letters from school about being late. He had moved out of his mum's house so she wouldn't find out he was smoking cannabis and 'ground' him: *"That's why I stay at my grandparents, they don't know really know if I come back stoned or smelling of weed or anything"*. Although they both still avoided the most blatant anti-school actions, such as smoking cannabis 'publicly', both Danny and AJ had clearly become less committed to doing well in their GCSEs and less interested in how this would affect them in the future. They seemed to be prioritising going out and getting drunk and 'stoned'. This was most apparent with AJ

who had completely lost motivation since I first met him and was in trouble for his poor attendance. According to the school records he'd missed a total of 40 school days from November to January through either 'bunking' or 'faking' illness to his mum:

Adam: *How much do you bunk off though?*

AJ: *Er... erm, I have actually bunked off but sometimes also if I'm like a bit ill I'll just be like really melodramatic and pretend that I feel like I'm going to die and that and then I have a day off school.*

Once again, the school's responses to such problems appeared to be based on monitoring students even more closely and providing additional 'interventions' (which seemed to be, at best, ineffective and possibly even harmful):

Adam: *What sort of marks have you been getting recently?*

AJ: *Er – well, I'm doing below [what] I was predicted in subjects and that.*

Adam: *Who said that?*

AJ: *Well they put me in a what you call it, personal development programme or something?*

Adam: *What's that?*

AJ: *It's basically like a motivational person comes in and speaks to us for half an hour [on your own, once every two weeks]*

Adam: *What's it like?*

AJ: *It's alright.*

Adam: *And who's this person?*

AJ: *A motivational person, a mentor [...] but when we have like objectives and that though I just lie about them.*

Adam: *Like what?*

AJ: *One of the objectives was to do homework, and 'cos I never do homework and one of the objectives was to do homework on the dates set, I just said like, er, gave her a list of random subjects! Another one was to go to bed earlier and I just lied and said – well it wasn't really a lie 'cos I was a bit but I was [still] just going to bed whenever I felt, like at three in the morning before [...] They don't know do they!*

Adam: *What are your objectives at the moment?*

AJ: *Well, err ... I think it was to carry on doing the other objectives but I've forgotten what they all are!*

The school's 'response' also appeared to cause arguments between AJ and his mum. He described how, *"she gets a phone call from here saying I haven't done my homework and then she like takes my computer away which is pretty stupid 'cos I use it to do all my other work but she thinks I just use it to play games and talk to people – now I have to go in her room and get it back when she's not there and that"*. Although Danny had been getting "letters home" he was obviously not under the school 'microscope' in the same way that AJ was. This was probably because his attendance remained good and that teachers were 'happy' that he was still getting *"B's and C's"*.

For Danny and AJ cannabis use may well represent a relatively unproblematic and 'normal' period of experimentation and use of drugs within a social context as part of their 'indie' identity. However, although it's not possible to assess whether this lifestyle at the end of

Year 10 was the cause or consequence (or both) of problems at school or at home from this data, their cannabis use coincided with having less motivation to work hard at school and lower expectations for the future, especially for AJ. Once marginalised at school a combination of drugs and alcohol also appeared to be an alternative source of bonding, which fitted with their indie 'style'. These students' actions may also be another example of *passive rebellion* and resistance to education through drug use: they are unable to be more actively rebellious because the school monitors them and also because the more blatantly 'naughty'/disruptive students wouldn't accept them. Finally, it is also worth noting that, while young peoples' social class and home-life are always likely to be critical in determining how well they do at school and how happy they are with school-life *it also seems plausible that this can also work the 'other way' whereby their experiences at home and their parents attitudes are influenced by schools*. For instance, as school 'labelled' AJ and the teachers repeatedly contacted his mum to tell her that he wasn't 'going to do well' their relationship had deteriorated.

## Conclusion

It is important to emphasise that the majority of young people I interviewed at Park Grove School were *purposively* sampled because of their attitudes and behaviour at school in order to examine and understand the experiences of some of the most disengaged students. That is to say, these young people's experiences are not representative of either all Year 10 students at this school nor of young people and their secondary school experiences more generally. However, this case-study provides insights into how students' attitudes and actions relating to drug use are determined by their secondary school experiences, as well as their family background, gender and ethnicity.

Young people's accounts of school life and their ideas about the future were sometimes *directly implicated* when they described their choices about drugs. More generally, students and teachers consistently made *links between, on the one hand, drug use and, on the other, young people's attitudes and behaviour relating to school*. This case-study suggests that the following three features of modern secondary school-life may structure young people's drug use: (1) *the friendships students make at school and their 'group' identities*; (2) *the pressures students face at school*; and (3) *students' 'plans' for their transitions from school to adulthood*. Each of these three potential 'pathways' will now be briefly discussed and, finally, attention is also drawn to the *power of schools*, which was also highlighted by this case-study, to conclude this chapter. In Chapter 7 the results of both school case-studies and the systematic review are summarised and synthesised in order to build theoretical insights about how young people's actions relating to drug use may be structured in the context of secondary schools, and to identify the key implications for policy, practice and further research.



Firstly, the data collected at Park Grove suggests that ***the friendships students make while at school are structured by their experiences and 'position' at school and that the adoption or rejection of drug use is a key factor in their group identities***, such as the 'hyper girls', 'football lads' and 'indie kids'.

In order to meet its academic 'targets' Park Grove streamed and 'sorted' students based on their academic achievement, attitudes and behaviour in school. The most disaffected and disruptive students could also be contained and excluded through either: 'isolation' – officially known as internal exclusion – in separate rooms; 'fixed-term' and permanent school exclusions; or through college placements and 'work experience' in Years 10 and 11. While the school itself helps to sort students into 'groups', the students themselves are also actively responding to the school organisation and their 'position' in it by forming close friendships and creating distinctive group identities. This process appears to take place during the *early years of secondary school*, relates to a student's sense of security and is constrained by their social background, gender, ethnicity as well as their 'position' at school. By Year 10 the active use or rejection of drugs such as cannabis was an important source of identity construction and means of *differentiation* among groups of students at Park Grove, especially for groups of students for whom other markers of status are not available at school. For example, it appeared that drug use may be particularly important for groups of anti-school *girls* who don't fit into the school's academic culture in order to express their group membership, distinction and rebelliousness, and to 'have a laugh'. Where other, non-academic 'markers' of status are available for boys they may be less likely to engage in drug use.

Those students who had become disengaged and unhappy at school but had *not* formed strong friendships at school appeared to find greater social and symbolic belonging – and form their identities – through *out-of-school friendships*, often with older friends. This appeared to be an alternative strategy for coping with their marginal status inside school for students such as Sonia and Mel. These students had strong links to drug-using (and drug-dealing) young people outside school and were exposed to a wide range of drugs and may be at significant risk of drug-related harm.

Secondly, ***drug use appeared to be a response to the pressures some students faced at Park Grove School, particularly the constant focus on academic attainment, the pressures of surveillance and control technologies and exclusionary practices***. Although seemingly unable and unwilling to *reinvent themselves* on the school's terms, several of the most disengaged and 'anti-school' students described in great detail how their school-life involved (and sometimes revolved around) policies and practices designed to punish and exclude them. Furthermore, as Park Grove School prevented more active forms

of rebellion through surveillance and isolation young people responded in *creative* ways to re-assert their identity, normative guidelines and rejection of dominant values. 'Blazing' appeared to offer some students a more passive (or 'mellow') form of resistance to school and help provide them with a credible excuse for their difficulties at school. These students' accounts were also largely consistent with another recent qualitative study of young people's drug use which suggested that cannabis use among secondary school students is more common than teachers often appreciate and that although some students smoked cannabis before and during school *teachers do not pick up on the fact that young people are 'stoned' in the classroom* (Melrose et al, 2007). However, teachers may also *choose* to ignore and 'hide' students' drug use.

Thirdly, the data collected at Park Grove illustrates how young people form their attitudes about their *future* in the context of both their experiences and 'position' at school, as well as their perceptions of the fate of their own (and their friends) parents and other adults they know. ***Students' 'plans' for their transitions from school to adulthood appeared to relate to their accounts of their motivations to use drugs or actively reject them.*** In particular, students with the most 'uncertain' transitions and the most fatalistic attitudes about their futures sometimes implicated this when describing their motivation to 'just have fun now' and get 'high', and also experiment with new drugs. Unlike the 'school stars' who were committed to middle-class, academic 'markers' of success and progress, drugs (and cigarettes and alcohol) are a more culturally-relevant indicator of *growing up* for these students. The 'indie kids' also interpreted increasingly heavy cannabis use and experimentation with other drugs as compatible with their transitions from school as they became less motivated by conventional 'markers'.

Finally, this case-study highlights the ***power of the school*** and its influence over young people's attitudes and action. At an institutional-level, the target-driven academic agenda largely ignored the most vulnerable and disadvantaged students' needs, preferences and goals and ultimately helped to maintain and reproduce existing patterns of *difference* and *inequality*. Thirty years after Paul Willis' seminal work on how secondary school cultures reproduced working/middle-class divisions, 'high-achieving' secondary schools such as Park Grove appear to reinforce (and reproduce) social disadvantage. While school achievement and healthy, pro-school identity-work may be *enabled* in this school environment *among young people from the most educationally-savvy and aspirational families*, students from the most dysfunctional and chaotic families appear to be marginalised at Park Grove. Students from these least 'perfect' backgrounds appeared to end up in an inevitable vicious circle of: growing unhappiness and disengagement with school and education; conflicting relationships with the staff and other students; increasingly uncertain futures; and, more 'extreme' forms of belonging and group identification. All of which could, in turn, contribute to escalating cannabis use, heavy drinking and experimentation with other drugs.

Furthermore, on an individual level, it was apparent that senior teachers and governors have the power to make irreversible decisions to exclude students. *We know that there are clear links between schools and drug use in terms of students who are not attending at all* (Goulden and Sondhi, 2001). In the case of Jerome it is not possible to say with any certainty whether he was the subject of 'unfair treatment' but other studies of black and dual-heritage boys' experiences at school have suggested that they may be subjected to 'different rules' for assessing their behaviour (Wright et al, 2000) and given harsher penalties than their white and Asian peers for the same offence (Blair, 2001).

Most worryingly, *the school only appeared to be willing to accept its power when it suited it*. In other words, it was only willing to acknowledge its power when it wanted to 'take the credit' for any school effects. The teachers at Park Grove (and the whole school environment) spoke to me about the *effect* of the school culture, organisation, policies and teaching practices on the students' academic attainment, particular their GCSE results. Paradoxically, they were largely unwilling to consider that, at the same time, the school might determine harmful outcomes such as drug use: if students were thought to be using drugs *this* was because of their 'upbringing', 'family background' and 'home-life' rather than their 'school-life'. However, it actually appears that while schools such as Park Grove have the power to 'add value' academically for many of their students they can also 'subtract value' and 'harm' a minority of the most vulnerable students.



## Chapter 6. Highbridge School case-study

### Introduction

Highbridge School is a mixed-sex 11-16 state school in inner London. Following the Labour Government's Fresh Start initiative in 1997 – whereby a 'new' school is launched in place of a school which is 'causing concern' – this school was renamed, the current head teacher was appointed and the school received additional funding, including nearly £10 million capital funding for new buildings to improve and modernise the school site. Those teachers who had worked at Highbridge school throughout this period were certain that significant improvements had been made (e.g. *"we've done tremendously well since it was Fresh-started"*, *"it's now a good inner city school"*, etc.). They particularly welcomed the new buildings and more 'productive' 'spaces' because, as one put it, *"[the students are] not cooped up all day now we've got those facilities"*. The school had also been granted specialist status since it had been 'fresh-started', which provided additional capital funding and a recurrent annual top-up grant for each student.

The most recent Ofsted *Inspection Report* concluded that Highbridge was a 'satisfactory' and 'improving' school in terms of: the standards being achieved at Key Stage 4 (14-16); the overall quality of education provided; and the school management. When I interviewed the head teacher he stressed the *"overwhelming importance"* of further improving *"standards of achievement and standards of teaching"* at the school. Ofsted Inspectors expressed their approval about the school leadership's 'relentless drive to improve achievement' in their last *Inspection Report*. Inspectors have also praised the extra-curricular provision at Highbridge School. A wide range of activities are provided before school, during lunch-break and after school, including sports and fitness, self-defence, street dance and theatre workshops, music tuition, media workshops, cookery classes, computer and video clubs and other activities. Extra-curricular activities are provided by specialist sports coaches and outside agencies as well as by teachers. The school also receives funding to provide a large number of targeted interventions for 'high-risk' students at the school, such as mentoring, literacy schemes and reading clubs. One teacher commented that it often felt *"more like a circus than a school"* with such a wide range of activities and programmes, and so many people *"coming and going"*.

Despite the recent positive *Inspection Report*, Highbridge students' GCSE results in 2007 meant that the school still failed to meet the Government's 'minimum target' for secondary schools: it is one of about six-hundred schools nationally where less than thirty per cent of students gain fewer than five good GCSEs including English and Maths. The school's performance is also considered to be 'below par' in terms of the Key Stage 4 value-added data which take into account nine factors outside a school's control which are known to affect attainment, such as gender, first language and deprivation. Furthermore, a senior

teacher also admitted that *"it's been proven from our records that there is also not much of an improvement at Key Stage three either"*. Opinion appeared to be divided among the teaching staff whom I interviewed as to the appropriateness and effectiveness of quantifiable 'targets' and 'league tables' in an inner-city school such as Highbridge. For example, younger, less-experienced teachers, such as one of the school's newly-qualified teachers (NQT), didn't think that it was *"necessarily a bad thing"* if quantifiable measures of achievement were the 'tail that wagged the dog': *"we've had a new head of science this year and she's improved the results from I believe 41 per cent to 52 per cent which is a 25 per cent increase by percent, well it's only an 11 per cent absolute increase but a relative 25 per cent increase. So 25 per cent more kids in relative terms are getting the national average which is what you are going for surely as a school"*. Some more experienced members of staff and teachers thought that league tables were an 'unrealistic' 'game' that the Government wanted secondary schools to engage in, and that the current system did very little to ensure that every child had the right to a 'good', 'all round', 'comprehensive' education at schools such as this. For example, the head of Year 10 explained that she was *"constantly under pressure to get results, results, results – it's a results driven industry"*.

At Highbridge the students come from a catchment area which is economically and socially disadvantaged and over half the students are eligible for free school meals. A humanities teacher described the school's 'intake': *"it is actually quite a good comprehensive school. You get everything here – not the proper upper class obviously but there are some middle class kids, some working class kids here and I suppose you could term some the underclass, like working class kids but their parents don't work and they are on benefits and got next to nothing, single mums and that. In that sense it is a comprehensive"*. About thirty per cent of pupils were deemed to have special educational needs and over three-quarters of the students came from minority ethnic groups, often with English as second language. According to the last school census, in addition to white British students (approx. 20%), the other large ethnic groups at Highbridge were: black and 'black-mixed race' students (approx. 45%); 'other' white students (approx 20%), the majority of who were Turkish; and Bangladeshi students (5%). At the last count, there were forty-three different languages spoken in the school. The head teacher described Highbridge as an inner-city 'rainbow school' in terms of its ethnic diversity and as you moved around the school groups of students could be heard speaking different languages. The school also clearly celebrated this diversity. For example, different national flags were displayed around the school in recognition of the students' diverse family backgrounds.

In total, seven boys and seven girls were interviewed and a wide range of different ethnic backgrounds were represented (see Appendix 1 for young people's socio-demographic characteristics). The head explained that he considered the school 'intake' in terms of 'five

ethnic groups': *"Afro-Caribbean [and dual heritage], white [British], Turkish, Asian, and then, equally importantly, about 10 per cent others from all the nations of the world!"* One of the first students I interviewed at Highbridge, **Fernando**, was one of those 'other' ten per cent of students. He was South American and was recruited into the study in order to gain a wider range of students' views and experiences (rather than because he was considered to be disengaged). His accounts of life at Highbridge school were particularly instructive, both in terms of understanding how young people 'survive' inner city schools and because they suggest why some young people actively reject the use of drugs, such as cannabis, even when it is relatively normal among their peers. His experiences of school-life and attitudes relating to drug use are presented first, below. The accounts of black and dual-heritage students are then presented to illustrate how they developed their friendships and identities in order to 'fit in' and stay 'safe' at school and how this, in turn, relates to their attitudes and actions in terms of cannabis and other drug use. These accounts are presented separately for boys and girls, and contrasted with other students' accounts, in order to examine how gender and ethnicity may structure young people's identities and experience of the school environment, and how these factors may shape their behaviour. In the final section of this chapter, the accounts of two female students are reported in order to consider how some young people try to construct 'multiple' identities at school and the constraints on some young people's capacity to do this. In each of these sections the views and experiences of teachers are also reported – as well as observations and documentary evidence – to gain further insights regarding the institutional 'rules' such as the school's policies and practices and the socio-environmental context, and to compare and contrast students' and teachers' perspectives.

### **Fernando: the experiences of an 'outsider'**

Fernando's parents were both South American and had moved to London after he was born. They both worked, although in relatively low-paid jobs. He thought his 'area' was 'rough' but that his flat was *"nice enough"*. Fernando said he initially felt like an 'outsider' when he arrived at Highbridge school. He explained, *"I'm not trying to be racist but most people are quite black and the only people who are white are people who try and dress like black people and be gangsters"*. It was difficult for him to find his 'place' at the school in Year 7 and that it was 'scary' at first:

*Adam: What's it like when you turn up here in year seven?*

*Fernando: It's scary. You've gotta stand up for yourself – make your name, make friends. If you got friends then at least you know you're safe. Not being the person alone is important. You don't want to be one person alone.*

*Adam: Did you know anyone when you first turned up?*

*Fernando: No – I was round school by myself to start with.*



The teachers I interviewed all suggested that the school could be 'scary' for lots of the new students. One teacher, who had worked at the school for several years, explained:

*"There are elements to it that can be quite rough and frightening, especially I think if you are a small child in year seven – I could imagine them being terrified. I don't think it's an easy school to come to but if you get over that initial – err – horror, I suppose, [and] then it's not as bad as it seems... but it's an inner-city school, you have some rough days."*

Fernando quickly realised that certain types of students would be bullied at this school: *"small people, people who are alone, people who have no way of getting help"*. He told me that students called him names – *"stuff about my country"* – and had tried to fight him when he started at the school. He explained that he had quickly learnt how to 'avoid' certain people at school and that by Year 8 things had 'calmed down' and started to 'change' for him. At this point he felt that relatively distinctive 'groups' started to form as *"people starting hanging round with different people, get their own spots to hang about round school and do their own stuff"*. He explained that it was *"just like, like one friend makes to another, you meet more people like you and then if anything ever happens, like someone starts a fight, then they'll be behind you"*. He appeared to have formed friendships with other students who were in a similar, minority – or 'outsider' – position in the school, such as Portuguese and other European students and students' with dual Asian and British heritage. Like the 'indie kids' at Park Grove school, these students appeared to find an alternative identity to the 'gangsters' and 'chavs' through alternative styles and different music preferences:

Adam: You and your friends at schools must have something in common?  
Fernando: Well we're all funny, sometimes go out together after school – go to the park.  
Adam: Has your group got a name then?  
Fernando: Well it's quite general so not really – but maybe like the rockers.  
Adam: What sort of rock?  
Fernando: Some of us like heavy metal, others prefer like more pop-rock stuff.  
Adam: Does the group include grungers then?  
Fernando: Yeah and skaters and that.  
Adam: What are the other groups in school then?  
Fernando: Well there is like RnB, Hip Hop gangs and groups, then all star sports groups, then Turkish groups round here – they like their own music.

Fernando also appeared to have found a sense of belonging at school because he had got to know lots of the teachers: *"Yeah I do get along with quite a few. I like my tutor. In my lessons I can ask them questions. Also, if I'm in any trouble like bullying then I can speak with them"*. The teachers' message to its students about the importance of getting 'good marks' seemed to have motivated Fernando: *"They say, 'you have to get good marks or college won't accept you'. You can't sit back and relax"*. He was doing well at school and getting *"mainly Bs"* when I re-interviewed him at the end of Year 10, although he was getting 'stressed' about his GCSE coursework and exams. Fernando had never tried smoking

cannabis or experimented with drugs, although he knew *“a couple of people”* who smoked cannabis and he knew that it was possible to buy it at school. This resistance appeared to reflect his ambition to please the teachers and his (and his parents) aspirations. He wanted to ‘do well’ at school in order to get a ‘good job’. Actively rejecting cannabis use also allowed him to reinforce this *alternative identity* by positioning himself outside of the dominant culture(s) at Highbridge which he associated with the ‘gangsters’ – *“[the] bad people and the troublesome ones”* – who didn’t ‘care’. He explained which ‘groups’ of students he thought used drugs:

Adam: *Is it certain groups who use drugs?*

Fernando: *It’s all the same students who smoke and drink, the gangster type of groups.*

Adam: *Tell me more about them then.*

Fernando: *They listen to R&B. Fifty Cent kind of people. They copy their [R&B artists] example with the way they dress. Weapons aren’t a big thing here but last term there was a knife and someone got stabbed. They think they are the number one in school and act all tough [...]*

Adam: *Are these people ambitious?*

Fernando: *They either don’t care or they want to do it their own way.*

Adam: *What does it say about people if they start smoking cannabis?*

Fernando: *I think it says they are going to turn really bad – they’ll be really ugly. Turn out to be a prostitute or something like that. As soon as you take it you take it again.*

Adam: *OK. Is that what people think?*

Fernando: *Yeah their life is going to be a mess.*

Adam: *Do you see that?*

Fernando: *I’m not sure how much it happens [...] but lots of people say other people do. Like they say there are prostitutes in the school and are doing stuff for crack and doing it for money.*

Adam: *Do you think that’s true?*

Fernando: *I dunno.*

His attitudes about students who smoked cannabis also suggested that he had not received adequate drugs education. Like several other students at Highbridge, Fernando admitted he couldn’t remember receiving any ‘proper’ drugs education while at school. A recurring theme across the teachers’ accounts was that they openly admitted that drugs education provision – and personal, social and health education (PSHE) more generally – was *“extremely limited”, “not a priority”* and *“inadequate, to be honest”*. The teacher ‘in charge of PSHE’ thought that any efforts which were made by the school management team to improve students’ health centred on the canteen or ‘food technology’ and *“that’s down to Jamie Oliver’s school dinners!”* The same teacher also suggested that unless frequent, high-quality drugs education became statutory in secondary schools, drugs education and other prevention initiatives would always be *“squeezed into ten or twelve minutes in a tutor group”* and *“occasional drop days”*, where students ‘come off timetable’ to attend workshops and *“get talks about drugs”*. This lack of drugs education is concerning, particularly for a school in such a disadvantaged area. While Fernando was creatively and actively using his ‘outsider’/alternative status as a ‘resource’ to avoid drug use and concentrate on his school-

work, other students (whose accounts are presented below) reported more 'risky' youth styles and identities relating to cannabis and other drug use.

### **Black boys staying 'safe' at Highbridge**

While Fernando explained how it was his 'outsider' status which made him 'scared' and influenced his actions and friendships at school, the other boys whom I interviewed at Highbridge were also developing their friendships and actively adopting identities in order to 'fit in' and 'survive' at school. In other words, their actions were also *constrained* and *influenced* by the school environment. A recurring theme among the black boys' accounts was the importance of being 'safe' and staying 'safe'. Compared to Park Grove school, Highbridge school not only had many more 'challenging' and disengaged black students but it also appeared to be characterised by a more 'scary' school environment and larger school social networks as students tried to get to know lots of other students, gain their 'respect' and, above all, *stay safe*. The accounts of two black – *safe, blood* – boys are particularly instructive regarding this process and provide the opportunity to explore how black boys' peer groups, identity-work and attitudes relating to drug use may emerge through 'safe' school cultures and in opposition to school. These students' accounts are presented first in this section. The accounts of other students, who distanced themselves from the 'most troublesome ones', are also drawn on later in this section to further explore how these students' actions may vary according to their personal 'resources' and to examine alternative safety strategies.

#### *Jermaine and Kyle: walking the walk, talking the talk*

Jermaine and Kyle were both from large, Afro-Caribbean families and appeared to have adopted the language and styles of the 'street' to stay 'safe' in school. For these students, it was more important to wear *"all the big labels from Footlocker – Nike, Adidas and that"* associated with urban 'street' styles rather than to adhere to the rules on school uniform. Their designer-label jackets, hooded-tops and flat-peak caps were perhaps an indication of their resistance to school. They adopted a common Black-centric 'street' dialect associated with urban youth cultures as a marker of that street-savvy, 'safe' identity. For example: if it looks good it's 'buff'; they 'jam' with their 'crew' and 'bloods' [friends]; and school is 'long' [boring]. More than any other word, 'safe' appears to have been incorporated widely into this dialect as slang for anyone or anything that's acceptable within their group's social norms and to signify greetings, agreement, respect and security. Recent studies of marginalised young people from minority ethnic groups, such as Norma Mendoza-Denton's (2007) study of Latino girl gangs, have highlighted how they use distinctive, *minority 'anti-languages'* – dialects which are structured to support and maintain the anti-societies from which they emerge – to construct and reinforce affiliations, belonging and status. Based on their



appreciation of and adherence to black urban street culture, other students and teachers would describe Jermaine and Kyle (and their friends) as 'safe, blood' students – a term of respect and solidarity used by these black boys; one of the teachers explained that these students were mainly black (but sometimes white) boys *"who do the whole gangster culture stuff, trousers round there knees and that, say 'safe'"*.

Jermaine and Kyle knew that they had to put up 'tough fronts' at Highbridge, a term originally used by Janelle Dance (2002) to describe the macho postures adopted among Black boys from the 'streets' school in New York. They both described *"bare [lots of] beefs [problems/aggression]"* and 'fighting', especially between different school-year-groups as young students sought to improve their reputation: *"some people have got badly hurt when they got rushed by other years, even older people"*. It was obviously important for them to be part of a 'crowd' who you could 'jam' with at school and to have a safe space at break-times. Their 'area' at school was the 'back playground' where they could 'MC' over tracks played on their mobile phones, play football or just 'chill' and talk to the girls. During the fieldwork there was considerable discussion about teenage 'postcode gangs' in London – twenty-seven teenagers were murdered in London in 2007 and one of these incidents was a stabbing near Highbridge school. However, Jermaine explained that, although there were occasionally 'beefs' over 'areas', territorial differences were normally left *"outside the school gates"* and that people didn't *just 'rep' their ends'* (such as their postcode or their estate) in school because it was better to be 'safe' with as many people in your Year-group as possible, and say 'cool' or 'safe' to them.

Jermaine and Kyle also both thought it was important to have friends at school who, were not just 'safe' but, you could also have a 'laugh' with at school and they admitted that they often found that the dangers of the school environment could be 'funny' as well as 'scary'. For instance, when Kyle described the craze among some students to set off fireworks in school during the autumn Term he said he told me he thought it was *"funny [because you] see people running around screaming in the playground... everyone is just running scared!"* A head of department at the school acknowledged that *"it can kick off any day here"* and the school had two uniformed police officers on site, although Jermaine's view was that: *"they just walk around and that, I've never seen them arrest anyone"*. Jermaine and Kyle both told me that they knew people who 'shot' [sold] 'weed' at school. For these lads having a crew and even carrying a knife to stay safe seemed to be an accepted part of the local culture:

Adam: *What do you think about gang violence?*

Kyle: *It's all political innit – some people show other people, other people do it for safety.*

Adam: *Would you carry a knife?*

Kyle: *Yeah for safety maybe but I don't go round shanking [stabbing] people, threatening people and all that.*

Although adopting masculine, 'tough fronts' at school appeared to be necessary for Jermaine and Kyle to be 'safe' and 'have a laugh' at school, this identity appeared to cause problems with most of the teachers. Conflict with the teachers and a lack of 'trust' were recurring themes in their accounts of school-life. Neither could say that they 'knew well' (or as Kyle preferred to put it, could *"have jokes with"*) more than one or two teachers on either of the occasions I interviewed them. Jermaine suggested that there was *"no space"* for negotiation or individuality in school because the teachers were too focussed on *"work...and, er, just the marks, innit"*. This situation made school too 'long' [boring] for Kyle: *"you don't get on with the teachers and some of the students, and it's long innit"*. Kyle had stopped participating in extra-curricular activities after school, such as football, because he said he disliked the teachers involved – *"they're not gettin' me"* – and had fallen out with them. He explained that he thought that the *"teachers don't know how to handle little stuff, normal behaviour"* associated with black youth cultures and that they didn't *"get where you're coming from"*. For both Jermaine and Kyle, arguments with the teachers over their 'attitude' and behaviour at school were causing arguments with their parents at home. For example, the teachers had said that Jermaine was 'underachieving' and 'lazy' and his parents now compared him unfavourably to his sisters: *"I'm expected to get like As and Bs 'cos one of my sisters, she got three As – that's another thing 'cos I have to compete against them"*.

Jermaine stressed that he did 'care' about his future but he was frustrated that the teachers didn't understand where he and his friends were 'coming from', and that they thought their attitudes and behaviours were simply down to *"their own free will"* when it wasn't *"just that easy"*. In other words, he appeared to acknowledge that he would do a lot better if he was under less pressure to be 'safe' and 'street' but these choices were made in the context of both the school and the wider socio-cultural environment he was growing up in. The NQT who was interviewed suggested that students such as Jermaine and Kyle needed to develop a 'double persona' if they were going to do well at school:

*"We've clamped down on uniform because students come in with hoodies on, trousers round their knees and stuff which is ordinarily how they dress on a weekend and that's fine but they have to realise that when they come to school they can't wear what they like and do what they like. Even if they are grown up and dressing like that outside school they need to have like, er, a double persona if you like – outside school they are streetwise but in school they need to realise they have still got to learn in school, classroom-wise if you like"*.

However, it appeared that being 'safe' meant being 'streetwise' and these students' accounts of drug use followed a similar theme: both Jermaine and Kyle smoked 'weed'. 'Blazing' with their friends appeared to be an almost inevitable extension of their 'safe' identity. Neither Jermaine nor Kyle said they particularly 'liked' the feeling of being stoned, however, as Kyle put it, *"you just do it 'cos there is no reason not to I guess"*. 'Blazing' was a 'social thing' for them, passing round 'joints' rather than smoking cannabis on their own. Jermaine's accounts of drinking also suggested the importance of social learning and social identity in determining

aspects of these students' substance use: *"I'm not really a drinker [...] probably 'cos the people around me ain't really drinkers"*. Kyle also wasn't a 'drinker': it made him too 'aggressive' and he had found cannabis to have fewer negative 'side-effects'. However, Kyle also admitted that he had *"seen what it [cannabis] does to people – they start it and they can't quit"*. Neither reported that they had received any drugs education at school and they were obviously learning about drugs on the 'streets' but they hadn't used drugs other than cannabis. However, this appeared to be due to *who they wanted to be* and their image of other drugs. That is to say, 'blazing' conformed with their 'street' – *safe, blood* – identity whereas other drugs, such as 'pills' and 'sniff', seemed to be associated with white, middle-class recreational drug-users. Their accounts of cannabis use – and identities constructed in relation to this – also contrasted with the accounts of two Turkish boys – Hamit and Deniz – who were interviewed as part of this study in order to gain a wider range of views and perspectives. Both these students identified with a strong, *ethno-centric Turkish 'group'* at *Highbridge school* in which it appeared more 'normal' to be a 'worker'. They both had strong anti-drug attitudes and emphasised that drug use was *not 'normal'* among their friends and in the Turkish community.

When I re-interviewed Jermaine at end of Year 10 he was clearly losing the motivation to learn and do well at school:

- Adam: *Why do you come here every day?*  
 Jermaine: *That's something I ask myself sometimes!*  
 Adam: *So when you ask yourself what conclusion do you come to?*  
 Jermaine: *I dunno you know, er...erm...*  
 Adam: *There must be some point in coming here if you're here though?*  
 Jermaine: *Well most times just 'cos you have too!*

Ofsted have reported that they are 'happy' with the school's arrangements for supporting pupils who 'misbehave' and only one permanent exclusion was reported in its last *Inspection Report*. When I interviewed Jermaine and Kyle at the end of Year 10, although neither had been 'permanently' excluded, they were both often excluded from lessons and sent to the 'referral room' (usually for an individual lesson) or the 'inclusion centre', based on the edge of the school site, for a whole day or more. Jermaine said that this made school even more 'boring' and that he couldn't *"be bothered with [school] anymore"*; he had also received several fixed-term 'suspensions' – most recently for a period of three days for fighting, which he considered to be *"not much of a punishment"*. These 'suspensions' and 'letters home' caused arguments and further strained relationships at home; his parents were even talking about moving out of London to Essex creating a sense of instability for Jermaine and further de-motivating him.

Kyle was also increasingly disillusioned when I re-interviewed him and failing to see the 'point' of school. He was also more difficult to talk to during the second interview and he



spent most of the interview avoiding eye contact and carving into the table with a penknife. The school's 'message' to students that they must get five GCSEs at grade A\*-C in order to succeed in life appeared unlikely to motivate him because he was now in *"all the foundation [lowest] sets"*. In a fantastic example of Orwellian double-speak, he was often excluded from class and sent to the 'inclusion centre'! He admitted that, in some ways, he actually preferred it in 'inclusion' because *"the staff actually get you there"* (whereas the 'normal' teachers *"don't relate you like"*), perhaps because they had more time to support students one-to-one in the inclusion centre and less pressure to raise overall levels of attainment. However, the frequent use of these practices – 'referral', the 'inclusion centre' and 'suspensions' – suggests that the fact that the school's record of permanent exclusions remains low (in fact, almost non-existent officially) is not itself necessarily indicative of a supportive or inclusive school ethos. The head of Year 10 admitted that because these sanctions were not recorded (like permanent exclusions) students such as Kyle were always likely to be 'sent out' of classes: *"that's actually taken quite lightly 'cos they can still be part of the inclusion centre [...] It's all about the red tape and the politics of it. It's not really about every child matters! You've got to make everything fit into the right categories and [make sure] the numbers don't exceed what the government wants"*. The school appeared to want to contain these students (rather than trying to engage them and support them) and were doing so in ways which were relatively *unaccountable* and did not impact on its 'figures'. In Kyle's case, he had become increasingly pessimistic about any academic success – and about his future more generally – as a result:

- Adam: *What's the best bit about still being at school then?*  
 Kyle: *Having laffs and that innit...*  
 Adam: *What are your plans for after school? Are you hopeful for your GCSEs?*  
 Kyle: *I dunno I've already missed one coursework an' that.*  
 Adam: *Are GCSEs hard?*  
 Kyle: *They are alright but they are too boring.*  
 Adam: *Do you see the point of doing GCSEs and working hard?*  
 Kyle: *Sometimes – sometimes it's like one question like seven-hundred and fifty word answers, essays on your own innit. You know when you start writing and it's like three-hundred words and then you just start chatting rubbish and you lose it [...]*  
 Adam: *Are you looking forward to the time you've got left at school then?*  
 Kyle: *No – definitely not [...]*  
 Adam: *So thinking about the future, are you worried or excited?*  
 Kyle: *Bit of both – sometimes when you're stuck with your parents you can't wait to leave home but others you think what if you've got no money and can't pay the way.*

At the beginning of Year 10, when I first interviewed Kyle, he had talked about wanting to get a 'trade' when he left school. When I re-interviewed him, he didn't mention going to college or getting a 'trade'. Instead he talked about how he'd like to work in the music industry – *"like be a Hip Hop producer or something"* – although he realised that this was unlikely. He appeared to be one of the students which a teacher described to me as 'lost' in-between

their *“low educational aspirations”* and the *“un-reality of the celebrity culture”*. Kyle had also seemingly accepted his identity of smoking cannabis with his ‘crew’. He also told me he was getting ‘stopped and searched’ by the police *“all the time”*, who now knew him. Neither Jermaine nor Kyle were especially keen to talk at length about their cannabis use in school but at the end of the second interview Kyle explained how cannabis use fitted into his life:

*“Well like today [Friday] it’s like the last day of the week and, like, because, near the weekend and that everyone’s finished school and work and whatever – so like go and enjoy yourself, get me”.*

He also admitted that ‘blazing’ can relieve the pressure if you have *“to go home to face your parents and you are nervous and t’ings”*. Although they were aware of some of the difficulties faced by students such as Jermaine and Kyle, the teachers appeared reluctant to try to support and ‘connect’ with them and to understand ‘where they were coming from’. A head of department at Highbridge explained:

*“[They sometimes] seem to just drift into one group or another and then you get categorized, then you can’t be yourself, you follow the group...some groups are so heavily involved in and identified by things like drugs that it would be harder to step back from those things [... but] to be honest though – I’m not the sort of teacher who they would talk to about that. I’m not their mate, I’m their teacher. That’s what I do”.*

Although they were ‘safe’ at school, Jermaine and Kyle appeared to find themselves in opposition with the school (and their parents). Furthermore, with values and standards for behaviour in opposition to those of the school they became *more* disengaged from education and had low expectations for the future by the end of Year 10. In keeping with another recent study (Melrose et al, 2007), lower expectations appeared to lead to higher levels of cannabis consumption. However, when other black boys adopted more ‘pro-school’ and ‘pro-education’ attitudes – and made more positive ‘connections’ with their teachers – this may have been at the expense of their safety. Another black student I interviewed who was selected randomly, **Jason** avoided ‘trouble-makers’ at school and described more positive relationships with several of his teachers whom he felt understood him. *“The best teachers are like friends as well”*, he explained. He described two of the teachers who he ‘got on with’: *“My history teacher – Mr Jones – he’s not my teacher but he worked in my last school and came here too when [Jason’s old school] shut down. Another ICT teacher who’s not my teacher – I get on with him ‘cos he’s from my country – he recognised my name and knew I must be from Nigeria!”* He’d also got to know another teacher at Highbridge: *“he’s my old maths teacher [from Year 9], we lend each other DVDs see, like animations and that”*. However, although he could put up a ‘tough front’ at school, he appeared to know that it was just that: a ‘front’. Jason reported that he hadn’t tried smoking cannabis (or any other drugs) although he knew that *“a lot of people at school do smoke weed”*. Not as much a part of the ‘safe’/‘street’ culture as Jermaine and Kyle, he was conscious that other boys his age were

*“more organised”* than him on the ‘streets’. For example, he felt he could easily get ‘rushed’ by a group of *“kids rep’ing their ends [area]”*.

### *Rastafarianism: an alternative ‘safe’ identity?*

Another black student in year 10 at Highbridge, Jay, was selected because the teachers felt that he had become ‘disengaged’ and ‘difficult’ at school. Jay had initially grown up with his mum in Jamaica and then come to live with his auntie on a council estate in north London when he was ten years old. He had been brought up as a Rastafarian in Jamaica and described this as his ‘religion’. It was in Jamaica that Rastafarianism emerged as a religious movement in the 1930s, although it has spread widely since, and Jay had adopted some of its highly-symbolic styles. For instance, when I first interviewed him he had dreadlocks. Cannabis – or ‘ganja’ – is also associated with the Rastafarian movement because many followers believe that smoking cannabis can be an aid to meditation and spiritual observance. Jay told me that he had first smoked cannabis *“back in Jamaica”* when he was about nine or ten years-old and that this was relatively normal: *“most people in my religion do”*. He explained that he didn’t smoke cannabis very often now – *“just on special occasions and to relax”* – because *“it just makes you feel stupid, it doesn’t make me want to blaze all the time or anything”* and he wouldn’t smoke it around school because he was *“not that disrespectful”*. He also emphasised that he did not think that smoking cannabis made him look ‘really good’ or ‘cool’. He also disliked other boys at school and in his ‘area’ who incorporated ‘dreads’ and ‘Rasta’ fashions into popular Hip-Hop ‘street’ fashion, and used this as *“an excuse to blaze [smoke cannabis]”*.

Like the other students he also thought that the school was *“scary when you first turn up”* and he told me about how some students brought fireworks and weapons to school, such as *“people going round with pellet guns [...] they had one lad on the floor with a gun to his head!”* He said students in the younger years also often got their mobile phones and money ‘jacked’ [stolen]: *“there is always people taking people’s phones”*. Despite these problems, Jay confirmed what several other students told me: the territorial elements of teenage gangs in London remained outside the school gates and that most students were pragmatic enough at school to stay ‘safe’ with students from different ‘areas’ while at school. He explained, *“there is like groups, specific groups [in school] but it’s not like there is really names for them, like when people talk about gangs. They don’t go the extreme limits or call them[selves] names in schools, like postcodes and that”*. Nonetheless, Jay realised that it was important to *“stick up for yourself”* and he had been suspended from school for a week for fighting at the beginning of Year 10, shortly before I first interviewed him:

Adam: *How has school been going for you so far this Year?*

Jay: *Um, it’s been going all right, apart from getting suspended!*

Adam: *What for?*



Jay: *Punching someone!*  
Adam: *That never goes down well! What was that fight all about?*  
Jay: *I just got like over-tempered innit, we'd played football and he stuck out his leg and then he was laughing in my face, laughing and makin' this kind of racist comment like – 'you Jamaicans, you monkey, you can't do this'. I just lost it [...] I broke one of his tooth.*  
Adam: *Did you not tell the teachers?*  
Jay: *He messes round all the time, no-one does nothing.*  
Adam: *So he's white is he?*  
Jay: *No, there's hardly no-one white here, he's like kind of Somalian colour. He's always mouthing off.*  
Adam: *Did you mention he was being racist to the teacher?*  
Jay: *No – no point.*  
Adam: *Do you still see that lad in school then?*  
Jay: *Yeah – he's in my tutor group. He's OK, he hasn't said anything since!*

Jay seemed to think that being able to fight was part of the image you needed to 'survive' at this school. In addition, his *cultural identity* as a Rastafarian may also have afforded him a ready-made form of resistance to school and additional 'street' credibility with other young people. He explained that, *"I know nearly everyone in my year, I say cool to them"*. (The only students he wouldn't 'say cool to' were the Turkish students: *"all Turkish people definitely just hang about by themselves, in one corner, get me"*.) However, although he thought it was important to *know* lots of people in his year-group he was also 'wise' about not getting in with the 'wrong crowd' of friends, particular some groups of black boys at the school: *"I don't think it's good to be good friends with lots of people actually here 'cos they can get you into more trouble... some people you don't want to get too close to 'cos they might drag you down"*. This indicates what a difficult balancing-act it can be for black boys to form their relationships and 'identities' at school, stay 'safe' and not get into trouble at school. Although Jay knew lots of the other students, he only had a couple of close friends to 'jam' with at school and he differentiated himself from the 'trouble-makers', such as Kyle, because he was committed to doing well at school and getting 'good marks' in his GCSEs. What he meant by the 'trouble-maker' groups was the *"big groups of boys that go round just talking to each other, they don't really mix with others, start trouble with another group and then all end up thrown out of school [...] the ones that [set off] fireworks and stuff"*.

Jay considered his GCSEs to be 'really important' *"'cos if you don't have that you can't get nothing man...If you haven't got no GCSEs then you'll be the next generation of street-cleaners!"* He told me more about the 'warning' that school sends out to students:

Adam: *Do teachers explain why it's important to get good marks?*  
Jay: *Yeah, like my form tutor he always goes on about it. He says for the first five years of your life, your GCSEs will decide the first five years of your life.*  
Adam: *Hey, you've already had the first five years?*  
Jay: *The first five years after school!*  
Adam: *Oh – but what does that mean?*

- Jay: *Say if you go for a job straight away they'll ask what grades you get, if you go for an um, er college place, they'll ask what grades [...]*
- Adam: *Does that motivate people?*
- Jay: *I dunno, I think it makes me scared. Specially now – like this teacher was saying we've only got so many weeks left at school so it's lots of pressure.*

According to Ofsted inspectors, a particular strength of the teaching at Highbridge school in Years 10 and 11 is that 'assessment is used well to motivate pupils' and 'support them in achieving well'. Interestingly, the school's focus on emphasising the importance of exam-based attainment on your life chances appeared to be most successful at motivating students such as Jay and Fernando who had migrated to London from abroad and appeared to be more willing to follow the school's 'message' uncritically. This may be because of both the greater opportunities they are afforded in London and perhaps also the scale of the poverty and other social problems they had witnessed and are aware of elsewhere. These young people's exclusion from 'indigenous' youth 'tribes', such as the 'safe' Hip Hop 'crews', which can lead to conflicting relationships with teachers and other adults may also actually be a positive 'resource' because of the space it gives them for pro-education identity-work with the teachers. Furthermore, Jay also knew relatively few other young people with negative experiences of life after school, such as brothers, sisters, cousins and other friends, and as such may have also had fewer reasons to doubt the version of events put forward by school. When I re-interviewed Jay he was still 'trying hard' at school. However, his account of life in Year 10 included a key theme which cut across the experiences of several students – such as Jermaine and Kyle – that conflicting relationships with teachers and the school's practice of frequently writing and phoning home could upset his home-life and cause him to argue with his auntie:

- Jay: *Some the t'ings they do – it's like my English teacher he gets me in a lot of trouble at home.*
- Adam: *Why?*
- Jay: *Like my coursework I wrote it and I needed to type it up or something and he kept on sending letters to my house.*
- Adam: *What do you think about that?*
- Jay: *I dunno. My attitudes to him is not that bad. I still sort of respect him 'cos I know he's trying to help me but when he sends my auntie letters then she threatens to send me back to live with my mum [...]*
- Adam: *Does your aunt keep a close interest in how you are doing at school?*
- Jay: *Yeah – while you're still in school she doesn't want to get no letters home or phone-calls or anything otherwise she'll be upset.*

Despite these difficult relationships with some of his teachers, Jay was still motivated and optimistic about the future. School had a 'point' for him: to learn and get 'good marks'. His cannabis use also remained moderate and this only formed a relatively small part of his social life. Although cannabis use was integral to his 'rasta' identity, it may have in fact been this same identity which help to provide him with a 'safe' route through secondary school

without having to form close relationships, identify with and be 'labelled', as one teacher put it, *"one of the more hyper-macho black lads"*.

### **'Safe' black and dual-heritage girls**

'Blazing' also appeared to be an important source of status and means to 'connect' with other 'safe' young people for black and dual-heritage girls. The accounts of girls' who identified with this 'safe'/'street' culture at the school are reported in this section to examine how their school experiences related to their attitudes and choices around drug use. Like in the Park Grove case-study, some of these girl's accounts suggested that drug and alcohol use could be an important source of bonding for marginalised students, provide an alternative marker of status and relieve their unhappiness with school. The views and experiences of two students who couldn't be 'perfect' and refused to change their styles for school are presented first in this section.

It also appeared – again, like with the Park Grove case-study – that disengaged girls who did not find the friendships and identities that they wanted *in school* may instead form close friendships and find a sense of belonging *outside of school* – with other young people in a similar position to themselves in their 'area'. The experiences of a 'chronic non-attender' are described in this section to illustrate some of the potential dangers for girls who have *grown up too fast* and cannot 'fit' into the school system which treats like them like 'kids' and how this may relate to their drug and alcohol use with *older, non-school friends*. Finally, one of the 'safe' girls whom I interviewed described how she was 'aiming high' during Year 10 and that she was optimistic about her future, however, she was also regularly using cannabis and 'pills' and drinking heavily. Her experiences are reported at the end of this section to highlight this diffusion of 'safe' identity-work based on cannabis and other drug use *beyond* the most disengaged students.

### *'I'm not changing for school': 'loud' and 'rude' styles as a 'resource'*

When I first interviewed Leanne at the beginning of Year 10 she had just returned from a fixed-term exclusion for *"fighting with a boy"* at school. Leanne lived with her two older sisters in a rented flat in North London because she wasn't 'getting on' with her mum. The issues which dominated Leanne's account of her experiences at school were: problems learning in school (e.g. *"my science teacher doesn't actually tell me what to do. She just says open your page and get on with your work. You don't know what to"*); and conflict with her teachers, particularly in terms of her 'attitude' (e.g. *"Most of the teachers would describe me as a rude girl who doesn't do what I'm supposed to... [They would say] I'm rude, disrespectful, loud, annoying and that"*). She didn't understand 'the point' of school and how it might relate to her 'future' (e.g. *"[I have] no idea what I want to do.... [I] just have fun now"*). Her difficult



relationships with the teachers and her behaviour in school had meant she was getting into 'lots of trouble': *"I keep arguing and get sent out and then [they are] writing incident reports to the head teacher and calling your house, letters home and that"*. She told me that she thought she was a 'typical' black British teenager and felt that she now got in trouble for 'everything' she did at school:

- Adam: Do you get in trouble here?  
Leanne: Yeah I get in trouble here everyday!  
Adam: For what?  
Leanne: For everything. Everything! They'll call my house like saying, er, say the teacher tell me to 'shut up' and I say 'don't tell me to shut up' they think I'm threatening and cussing them. Most of my lessons I get sent out...

Leanne emphasised her agency and her refusal to 'change' when she talked about her actions at school: *"I don't do it for fun – that's the way I was born. I'm not changing for school. I've also been talking since I was a little kid. I can't shut my mouth. I have to have my say"*. She strongly identified herself with other 'safe', anti-school black girls and she found it funny that there were a few white, 'geeky' girls who didn't feel safe at school:

*"I know for a fact some people don't feel safe. Like I know who them people are – they don't feel safe for sure [...] most of them look like geeks 'cos they have glasses and they come in dressed like freaks from Camden Town and everyone just picks on them. [We] call them the witches, and whatever. They believe in the devil and all that. They dress like they aren't meant to be in this world"*.

She explained why she wasn't scared at school and how safety related to ethnicity at Highbridge:

- Adam: So a lot of people don't feel safe here you reckon?  
Leanne: Not that many. I'm not being racist or anything but I know for a fact that all the black kids feel safe.  
Adam: Why's that?  
Leanne: They just stick with each other. And if there's a fight they all just jump and stick with their crew.  
Adam: It's the white kids who aren't safe?  
Leanne: Well some other white kids hang with the black kids 'cos then they know all the big black kids will fight for them. [...]

Outside school Leanne identified strongly with the Hip Hop scene. On a weekend she would go to parties and 'ravings': *"The ones I go to in Peckham is only black people. They still give you alcohol but you gotta be on a level otherwise if you get drunk you get kicked out"*. She said that smoking cannabis 'felt normal' and reported that she routinely smoked 'weed' after school. She acknowledged that as well as wanting to 'have fun' the desire to 'look bad' and to identify herself with the other 'safe' kids had been an important motivation in her initial cannabis use:

- Adam: So why do you all do [smoke cannabis] then?
- Leanne: Well some people say it keeps you out of trouble. Others say they do it 'cos it makes them more confident. That's what some of 'em told me.
- Adam: Is that why you started then?
- Leanne: Er, you smoke it for fun. And you wanna look bad. People think you're a bad boy or bad girl.
- Adam: What sort of students here smoke cannabis then – what are they like at school?
- Leanne: With me they are cool and I'm safe with the boys here [...] but we are the bad ones, the rude ones – get excluded and that.

Leanne told me that she was sure that the teachers knew who was smoking cannabis but that the school actively ignored the problem: *"Oh yeah teachers know blazing and that is a problem here for sure – they know who's who and who's doing what but they can't be bothered to do nothing 'bout it"*. Her head of year acknowledged that 'no-one is addressing it' (which backed-up Leanne's belief that the school would sometimes rather *hide* the problem): *"I've had kids in year ten who smoked weed and just got a head's detention. People are aware of it but no-one is addressing it"*.

I also interviewed one of Leanne's friends at Highbridge, Rosie, a 'mixed race' girl who lived with her dad in east London. She had moved away from her mum to live with her dad several years ago: *"[my mum] used to leave me and my brother in the house with another little boy and she used to go partying with her friend every night until like six A.M.! I used to be awake. I don't like going to sleep when there is no adult in the house 'cos it feels weird"*. Even though she knew her 'area' was *"probably quite a bad place to live"* – *"there is always fights or shoot outs or people getting robbed or beat up or someone's house getting broken into or smashed up or something going on"* – nothing had 'happened' to her. Like Leanne, she felt that she was 'safe' with most of the students in her school-year and she told me about their 'own little bit' where they would 'hang about' at school at lunch time with their friends at school: *"there is this little corner in the back of the school and everyone just goes round there – everyone that we hang around with [...] when you are in the big playground there is loads of kids running about and stuff and everyone screaming. I don't do that"*. It was a relatively small space but Leanne, Rosie and their friends – *"we all understand each other"* – seemed to like it because, as Rosie put it, *"[the teachers] don't know what we're doing right back there"*. Rosie admitted that when she got really 'stressed' at school she went there to 'hang around' and smoke cigarettes.

Like Leanne, Rosie stressed her agency and unwillingness to 'change': *"I'm not changing for school"*. She also didn't 'get along' with most of her teachers and reported that she 'can't stand' some of them:

*"I hate it when everything has to be perfect – nothing is ever gonna be perfect with a bunch of kids, there is always gonna be something wrong. Like, they will tell you to move seat, say 'sit here' and point... but what is the point? Just*

*moving one seat over say, what is the point? I say, 'that is not going to stop me talking so you might as well just send me out'".*

She preferred the few teachers whom she thought gave her extra 'credit' and whom you could: *"get to know"*, and *"mess around with more as long as you don't overstep the mark"*. However, these were clearly the exceptions rather than the norm in her experience and Rosie thought that school was 'long' (short-hand for a long, boring process) because of the teachers who continually told her that she had too much 'attitude' and punished her for it. She responded by getting her own back when she could. For example, she told me that she would *"always try and catch teachers out"* with her uniform. She also explained how she would 'pick on' certain teachers:

Rosie: *When I was on report one teacher said I purposefully annoy him to the amusement of the class [laughs].*

Adam: *Do you think you do that?*

Rosie: *I do do it but not to amuse my class – for my amusement!*

Adam: *What do you do?*

Rosie: *I don't know if bully him is the right word – I pick little things out that I know annoy him, like with this teacher everything has to be proper and in the right place and don't mess with his rulers and don't write on his calculators or something and then I purposely mess it all up and stuff and he will look at me. I can see his jaw clenching in his mouth but he won't say nothing and I will just laugh at him and actually I have got quite gooder 'cos before I used to just do something in like five minutes and I would go to referral – now at least I haven't gone to referral since last month!*

An experienced teacher and departmental head at Highbridge admitted they had seen teachers crying and that *"some teachers had been got to"* by students such as Rosie and Leanne *"who are hyper attitude all the time"*. However, another senior teacher explained that they felt, while these students may 'play up' and 'annoy' some teachers, the school will always win the 'wrestle for power' in the end because the students *"don't really have any power as such"*. Rosie seemed to be unconcerned by most of the school's punishments, such as 'referral' which involved going to a room with the *"mostly bad kids"* whom the teachers *"can't handle"*. She explained why she wasn't worried about 'referral': *"it's ok, you just sit there and do nothing – you don't feel like you're being punished, it's not detention or anything, [...] referral is just one lesson and then after the pips [the end of lesson 'bell'] you go back to your normal lesson"*. On the other hand, the 'inclusion centre' on the edge of the school site, also known as the 'X block', was obviously what Rosie and her friends wanted to avoid because it meant you couldn't see your friends: *"[if you] have been really, really bad then they send you [to the 'inclusion centre'] in school so you still have to come to school and you still 'ave to learn stuff but you don't go to any of your normal classes you just stay in this little hut thing!"*

(Like at Park Grove) this appears to be why a school can always 'defeat' students – by taking them out of the main school site and isolating them. Her experiences of secondary



school, such as spending 'time' in the 'centre', meant that Rosie was already looking forward to leaving school at the beginning of Year 10, even though she didn't know what else she would do other than perhaps *"go to college somewhere"*. She had low expectations for the future and even if she could have chosen another style or identity which would improve her relationships with the teachers at school she wasn't willing to re-invent herself just because the school told students that 'good GCSEs' equals a 'good job'. As other studies (such as, Brown, 1987 and, more recently, MacDonald and Marsh, 2005) have found, this 'message' from schools contradicts the experiences of students like Rosie who usually only know lots of people with 'shit jobs', such as their parents, uncles and aunts, brothers and sisters, and other people in their 'area'. Furthermore, *it is this style and identity which helped her to 'fit in' and stay 'safe'*.

Rosie wasn't 'hanging about' with Leanne very often outside of school by Year 10 and it appeared to be relatively normal for students at Highbridge to have two 'close' groups of friends – one in, one out of school in your 'area' – because of the relatively large school catchment area and complex secondary school admission policies. Rosie described herself as a 'drinker' and, although she knew lots people who smoked cannabis and didn't see anything *"wrong with it"*, unlike Leanne she didn't smoke cannabis. She explained that she *"just didn't need it"* to have 'fun'. She did, however, appear to be keen to portray herself as someone who could 'hold' her alcohol:

- Adam: Do you get drunk?  
 Rosie: No – I can hold my alcohol – I drink anything – I don't know why but [my friends] keep buying vodka at the moment.  
 Adam: What do you drink that with?  
 Rosie: Coke and lemon but I don't like the taste of vodka.  
 Adam: In pubs?  
 Rosie: No I couldn't get into one, this is normally at someone's house. Right, my dad knows I drink but not as much as I do – he thinks I drink little bits – he doesn't know I can drink a whole bottle of vodka and nothing will happen to me.  
 Adam: What do you mean a whole bottle?  
 Rosie: You know those big ones [approx. 75 centre litres] and I wont be like proper drunk but tipsy.  
 Adam: What do you mean by tipsy?  
 Rosie: Giggly and wont be able to walk in a straight line but not so drunk I don't know what I am doing. I will know what I am doing.  
 Adam: Do you ever do anything you regret?  
 Rosie: No I have never done any of that – I always remember. The people who don't know what they are doing, it is always me that is looking after them!  
 Adam: So you have never been sick or anything?  
 Rosie: No – only once but it was 'cos I was ill.  
 Adam: OK [...] Do you ever worry about the effects on your health though?  
 Rosie: The way I see it – I do worry about my health – but I think as long as I have had fun in my life and done everything I wanna do by the time I am gone – I don't have more regrets... if I am ill I have done everything I want to.

If 'blazing' was a means to 'connect' with other young people and have fun for Leanne, then drinking vodka seemed to have a similar purpose for Rosie. Unfortunately it wasn't possible to explore these links in subsequent interviews because when I went returned to Highbridge in the summer term neither Leanne nor Rosie were still attending. Neither had been 'permanently excluded'. Leanne had received several 'fixed-term' exclusions and now attended a pupil referral unit because she was 'refusing' to come to school. No-one seemed to be too sure why Rosie wasn't in school in the summer term which suggested that some students went 'missing'.

There is little doubt that these students could be very challenging and disruptive at times, as one teacher put it, *"just one or two is enough to bamboozle your whole lesson"*. However, the head and other staff appeared to make few efforts to support them and keep them in school, preferring to talk in terms of an inevitable 'hardcore' of 'school refusers' rather than considering how the *school refused these vulnerable students*. Furthermore, the version of events that school puts forward – if you are quiet and sit and listen all day at school you'll learn and get 'good marks' and a good job etc. – doesn't fit with their experiences and ignores the pressures they face at school. There are other, more attractive and attainable, markers of success and 'fitting in' and different routes to a 'good life' for these students. Above all, there are better ways to spend the day than sitting in the 'inclusion centre' (which feels like you're being 'put in a shed' by the perimeter fence), such as smoking 'weed', 'chilling out' and hanging out with friends. The young people who *they knew* who had the highest status and the most fun were usually not at school trying hard and doing well. A head of a department at the school who had taught at Highbridge for nearly ten years acknowledged that it was a 'vicious circle':

*"There is a hard-core of students who want to disrupt every lesson – these kids just feel so alienated ... It's a self-fulfilling prophecy 'cos they get a name for themselves and then are just in and out of school and PRU and that".*

Once out of school these students are likely to be at greater risk not just of escalating drug use but also of other 'risks', such as teenage pregnancy. For example, the head of Year 10 explained: *"I should open a crèche! [...] Four have had babies – and one as we speak is currently having an abortion – out of about 70 [girls in Year 10]"*. Another student, Donna (white British) – who had moved to Highbridge at the beginning of Year 10 following 'problems' at other schools – described how she had 'bunked off' to *"smoke fags, smoke joints, get wasted"* while at her previous schools in another 'area'. However, she didn't appear to identify as clearly with the 'safe', urban/street culture at Highbridge or feel 'part' of the school and the head of Year reported that Donna's attendance had been 'appalling' in the spring and summer terms, that she hadn't settled and that she was no longer at Highbridge School by the end of Year 10 and it was no longer possible to carry out a second interview. The following account of a student who had spent a considerable amount of time

out of secondary school on the 'streets' exemplified the connections between truancy and drug use and also suggests that some girls may be *growing up too fast to 'fit in' and feel 'part' of their school*.

#### *Amelia: the 'chronic non-attender'*

**Amelia** had only been at Highbridge School since Year 9, having been excluded from her previous school in Year 8. She had dual heritage (white-black British) and lived on a local council estate with her mum and her 'little' brother. She was selected to take part in the study because of her persistent truancy from school. During Year 9 she had been recorded absent for fifty-two days – the equivalent of over two months of school in total: *"sometimes I just slept or if not [I'd] be with my other friends who don't go to school either"*. Amelia had obviously spent quite a bit of this time, when she couldn't be *"bothered to go school"*, just 'hanging around' and smoking 'weed' (e.g. *"people would just buy it and I would just have some, just pass a bit round and that"*). She was one of a group of students described by the head teacher as *"chronic non-attenders"*, of whom he estimated there was *"at least thirty"* across all the year-groups, as well as *"a bigger group of about seventy whose attendance is between 60 and 90%"*.

When I interviewed Amelia at the beginning of Year 10 she told me that the only reason she was still attending school at all was because *"some government woman"* (from the local education authority) had threatened to fine her mum *"up to one-thousand pounds"* if she continued to miss school. Her mum now made sure she went to school everyday, although they never really 'talked about school'. Although the threat of a 'fine' had obviously had the desired effect in terms of improving Amelia's attendance, this intervention from the local education authority had done nothing to improve her relationship with the school management team and the other staff at Highbridge. She 'hated' the school's authority and the restrictions it placed on her, particularly the head teacher: *"he walks round like he's the boss... he's bare moany about uniforms and just shouts"*. According to one of the teachers, *"the whole point [of the school uniform policy] is that there's no argument – it's uniform or go home"*. However, Amelia's 'school uniform' appeared to consist entirely of her normal street-wear and designer clothes, and this frequently caused arguments between her and the teachers. This conflict with the teachers was a recurring theme in her accounts of school and she told me that she couldn't wait until she could leave school: *"Some of my friends [in the year above] are leaving in April and I'm like 'you're so lucky, I wish I was leaving this year'"*.

Amelia appeared to feel imprisoned at school like Leanne, Rosie and the 'hyper' girls at Park Grove, however, she didn't appear to have such close bonds with other 'hyper' or 'naughty' students at school as they had. In the same way she couldn't 'fit in' with the school rules and procedures she didn't identify with *"all the little girls"* at school. Although she *knew* lots of



other students who lived in her 'area' or on her 'estate', she had only one or two close friends at school:

- Amelia: *I have got loads of friends – but I am the sort of person that I keep myself to myself in school – so people in school I don't class them as my friends so you know what I am saying?*
- Adam: *You have got more friends out of school?*
- Amelia: *Yeah like in school they are two-faced they are spoilt little girls – I can't be bothered – I have got two friends in this school and that is it really, everyone else is my associates and I don't class them as my friends 'cos I don't trust them so they are not really my friends.*

She had only joined Highbridge school relatively recently (in Year 9) and her attendance had been extremely erratic since then so it is perhaps not particularly surprising that Amelia had relatively few very close friends at school. Amelia did, however, talk at length about the friends she had on her 'estate', usually other young people who were slightly older than her and had left school – “they're 'bout from my age up to about seventeen” – and who she identified herself with. Drugs were obviously an important part of 'life on the estate' for these young people. For Amelia this meant smoking 'weed'. It was easily available (e.g. “you can get it like that round there”, she said clicking her fingers) and it marked you out as part of the 'estate crowd': “the kids who don't smoke it do their work, don't get in trouble and that”. Amelia also accepted that problematic drug use was part of her 'estate' and enjoyed the 'excitement' and 'mad things' that happened there. For example:

- Adam: *Tell me about the mad things then!*
- Amelia: *Right, there is this mad crack-head woman yeah – she comes down from south [London], she's from Brixton – she always comes out and she's like 'reps out'. Everyone's like 'fuck south', bigs up north and then she comes out with all these knives and starts chasing everyone and then starts taking off all her clothes. I love her!*
- Adam: *Why?!*
- Amelia: *She's funny. It's so much entertainment. I love it when she comes out. She takes off all her clothes and she says if you want to do a murder take off all your clothes so you don't get DNA on your clothes and she starts stripping and stars chasing after us!*
- Adam: *You think that's funny when she chases you naked with a knife?*
- Amelia: *Yeah that's funny. She's mad, she goes in the shop and gets beer and throws it everywhere. And she wears this wig and one of my friends took the wig off her head the other day and we had a big black bag and she said, 'put my wig in there and fill it with cement and put me in there'. Then my friend put the bag over her head and she was jumping about and that!*
- Adam: *Why did she did say that?*
- Amelia: *It's the crack – she was like 'I smoke eighths of crack everyday'. She said to my mate go down the shop and get me a single and we was like 'no'. She was going, 'I gave head to get that money'. I was like get away from me!*
- Adam: *Is that normal on the [estate]?*
- Amelia: *Oh, probably, near [local tube station] there is bare [lots of] crack-heads and prostitutes. She's the main one on the estate though.*

As well as these sources of 'entertainment' on her 'estate', Amelia also went out clubbing with her 'older friends'. She emphasised that she went to *"proper raves"* and not *"just them shubs [parties for under-18's] – that's little people's stuff, I go to adult raves"*. Amelia seemed to place considerable importance on being known as someone who went out 'raving' at these clubs, differentiating herself from other girls who couldn't get in clubs and drank on the streets, like the 'little girls' at school. However, this quote exemplifies how, on the one hand, she wanted to *stand out* and be identified with the more grown up, 'club' scene; while, on the other hand, it was still important for her to *know* as many people at school and in your 'area' for safety:

Adam: Do you drink much when you go out?

Amelia: Yeah I do drink. Me and my girls – and some boys come – we go out on Friday drinking. We go some rave in Tottenham. It's over 18s but we get in.

Adam: What do you drink?

Amelia: Vodka and red bull, JD and red bull and that, Courvoisier brandy [...]

Adam: Is it people from your year?

Amelia: No I go with my older friends to get in.

Adam: Do you get quite pissed?

Amelia: Sometimes I do – it depends if I stay at my friend's house. If I have to go home on the bus then I don't [...]

Adam: OK and what about when you're just knocking about out during the week, what do you drink then?

Amelia: I don't like drinking when I'm just out for the sake of drinking – it's a bit trampy.

Adam: You don't like drinking on the streets?

Amelia: No I like getting dressed up and going out. My other girls who don't get in they just sit there in the blocks and just drink. It's stupid 'cos the boys look at you and they think 'what are you doing'? They get bare drunk in the estate.

Adam: What are they drinking?

Amelia: White Ace and K [ciders] and that, they are like bare drunk and going 'low it and everything.

Adam: But you're still friends with them?

Amelia: Well there is this massive group of about fifty girls and boys in our area and then we have our own little sets and that. We are all together but different. If there was a beef with different ends we would come together.

I interviewed Amelia again at the end of Year 10. She had stopped attending again (after I had first interviewed at the start of Year 10) until her mum received *"a hundred and fifty quid fine!"* She had also been excluded *"a couple of times"* since I first interviewed her for *"being rude and stuff to the teachers... they chat shit"*. This appeared to be another way to avoid school but without the risk of a fine for her mum! Despite her continued high-level of absence, her attitudes towards her education appeared to have improved over the course of Year 10 and she was determined not to leave school with 'nothing'. Amelia explained this greater motivation and 'effort' in terms of 'the end being within sight' and that she now knew that she needed 'good grades' to get onto her first-choice college course:

Amelia: It is better 'cos I am leaving in thirty weeks [...]

- Adam: *How much do you reckon you will come to school before you take your final exams?*
- Amelia: *I am just gonna come into school and just get it over and done with – there is no point – and then get my GCSEs and go to college – there is no point me coming to school all these years and then leaving with nothing – there would be no point – and then I will just go mad ‘cos I have done it for nothing [...]*
- Adam: *So when you say you want to go to college – what would you have to do to get to college?*
- Amelia: *The college I want to go to is in West End but you have to get a, er, you’ve got to pass Maths and English and get a C or a B in science – so you have to be quite good at science – so I have to get good grades in my GCSEs to get in –*
- Adam: *Do you think you are going to be able to do that?*
- Amelia: *Yeah – I just have to be here for them to enter me!*

Amelia’s accounts suggested that she ‘hated’ school because she was too *independent* for the school regime, and the impositions its policies and teaching practices placed on her, rather than because she had problems learning or didn’t understand the importance of education. For instance, she explained to me:

*“The work is alright – I don’t mind doing work. I don’t mind it is just, I can’t even explain, I just don’t wanna be here. If I had a choice – if I could get a good job without going to school then I wouldn’t be here – but I know that if you don’t get GCSEs you ain’t gonna get nowhere”.*

Despite Amelia’s motivation to get ‘good grades’ she was still going to ‘raves’ and one nightclub in particular: *“I know everyone in the club now – I am talking about everyone, so I could go there on my own [...] I would get a lift home and whatever and someone would probably stay with me – but I don’t go on my own. I go, me and Hannah and then sometimes my cousin will come and sometimes we meet people in there”.* Furthermore, although she was now smoking ‘weed’ less frequently, she admitted that she had tried ‘pills’ and ‘sniff’ [powder cocaine], although she emphasised that she was *“not doing like crack-heads stuff”* which she considered to be ‘nasty’. The accounts of another student also strongly suggested that it wasn’t *only* girls at Highbridge who disliked school and had low expectations for the future who were ‘blazing’ and trying ‘pills’. These activities also appeared to be an equally (if not more) important ‘safety strategy’ and source of ‘bonding’ for pro-education students who needed to be seen ‘getting high’ as well as ‘aiming high’.

*Roxy: aiming high and getting high*

Like Amelia, **Roxy** lived on an inner London council housing estate with her mum. She had been at the school since Year 7 and, like most of the students at Highbridge, Roxy appreciated that the school’s reputation had ‘really improved’ in recent years:

Adam: *Do you think this is a good school.*



- Roxy: *We were at the bottom at one point and we have really improved since we've been open [under the current school name].*
- Adam: *Do you know where you are in the league tables now?*
- Roxy: *No – not exactly.*
- Adam: *Is it important to the teachers to do well in the league tables?*
- Roxy: *Yeah obviously 'cos you've got to give the government your figures and if it's like you're not getting enough A to Cs they're like you've got a problem.*
- Adam: *Do you think people try and get good marks for the school then, or is just for themselves then?*
- Roxy: *For themselves obviously but it all contributes to the bigger thing*
- Adam: *And the teachers?*
- Roxy: *Yeah they're mainly bothered about the marks. Obviously they want to help you 'cos they have become teacher but the marks is always there, they gotta get them up and improve [the school].*

Although she disliked aspects of school-life, such as the uniform, coursework and 'moany' teachers *"who are too black and white"*, Roxy thought Highbridge school was 'OK' and liked *"most of the teachers"* by Year 10. The purpose of school for her was *"to get a good job and lots of money!"* She was ambitious and had formed relatively clear plans for the future: *"I want to be a barrister really and I know what I want to do at A-level [...] I want go to college do five A-levels then I wanna go to law college"*. She also felt 'safe' at school and identified herself as one of 'black girls':

*"There is the Turks, Turkish groups. Then there is the Indian people. There's a few of them here but not as many as the Turks, there's loads of them. There is like the punks and the emo people who do their hair all funny. Then there is white chicks and like there is all the boys. In the boys there are the black boys and then everyone else. Then there is us black girls [...] the Turkish are alright really but they speak their own language. We [the black girls] go out, get stoned, get drunk and that. Then the other people who are proper good – but that's not many people here at this school!"*

She felt that she was 'cool' with the other black girls – *"people who I don't even know, they just know who I am, they come up to me and say 'Hi Roxy you OK'"* – and like the other 'safe' black girls she identified with urban, 'street' styles and music: *"I like garage, RnB, Hip Hop anything..."* However, Roxy contrasted herself with other blacks girls in her Year who 'hated' school, couldn't keep up with the work and *"don't have a dream, or if they do it's quite far-fetched"*. She wasn't as 'lost' as them and didn't get in as much 'trouble': *"I ain't been excluded, I ain't been thrown in the inclusion centre, I don't get sent to referral, I don't get head's detentions very often, if I do it's normally just for being late, untidy and that"*. Roxy's attendance and behaviour was much better than, for example, Leanne's, however, one of the teachers suggested that the school could also be more lenient to students who were likely to get 'good marks':

*"It's hard for me to say but as an observer though – to be completely honest – you do see different children being treated differently for the same, er, offence, [...] say two children were smoking, one might end up in exclusion and the other might not or one might end up there for longer. I know there might be a*

*reason for that, for instance the number of times they've done it an' whether things have build up, but sometimes you can't help but think that maybe it's 'cos the parent's kicking up a fuss or 'cos they kid is going to do well for the school in term of their GCSEs so want them in class like. They maybe pander to some more than others. I'm sure on paper the school has perfect policies though!"*

Roxy explained that outside school she would often *"drink and bunt [smoke cannabis]"* with friends from her 'area'. According to Roxy, *"you have to change"* when you go through secondary school and *"try things"* like smoking cannabis:

- Adam: When did you first smoke weed then?*  
*Roxy: When I was year nine [13] – it's the year when everyone messes about after SATs and that.*  
*Adam: Where did you get it from then?*  
*Roxy: Just my friends – you can buy it like – I know a lot people who shot [sell drugs]. Most people I know do it.*  
*Adam: What sell it or smoke it?*  
*Roxy: Some of them both. I know at least ten people who deal cannabis*  
*Adam: At this school?*  
*Roxy: Some at school yeah, some outside [...]*  
*Adam: Do you think there are lots of students here smoking weed?*  
*Roxy: Yeah – it's seen as acceptable like and not seen as nothing bad.*

It appeared that for Roxy one of the attractions of smoking 'weed' was its adaptability. Firstly, you could smoke it *"anywhere really"*. Secondly, *"it either makes you hype or it mellows you – depends on which frame of mind you are in, you can smoke it and go straight to sleep if you want"*. Furthermore, cannabis was relatively cheap and the cost could be shared with friends:

- Roxy: Obviously you've got shotters [drug dealers]. You just pick up off them like – I wanna a fives, tens [or] a score. Then go shop buy drink.*  
*Adam: How long would a score [£20 pounds worth] last you, quite a while?*  
*Roxy: No! Out of fives you can get like one good zute [joint] or two shite zutes. Out of tens you like right three decent zutes or like peng [?] zutes. Or out of a score you can get like six.*  
*Adam: How much would you smoke?*  
*Roxy: I'd go halves on a score, or with two other people and then just pass.*

She explained that she also 'liked drinking' – either at *"a party or my friends house or just go to an estate and sit outside"* – and that she would share *"about a litre of vodka"* with her friends on a Friday night. Roxy described how she had *"passed out"* from drinking too much before and admitted that, *"I was so scared – I've never been that scared in my life"*, although this experience didn't seem to change her patterns of consumption. She had also used 'pills' before, both when she was 'out' (on the streets) and at a 'house party'. Roxy explained that even though the experience *"was weird [and] really scary"* and she realised that cheap 'pills' were likely to be 'crap' that it was another cheap way to have 'fun':

*"It's so cheap, it's like two [pound] fifty for a pill, a fiver for two. That's for something proper. Even if you haven't got that much money you can still get something but it'll probably be crap though".*

Roxy had adopted lots of the same practices as the other 'safe', black girls for excitement and friendships and to *fit in with the common culture* based on the urban, 'street' scene and hip hop music. In her opinion, *"nowadays all black kids have their own crew. Holloway Boys, Peckham Boys, Tottenham Boys, Hackney Boys they've all got their own crews and they all do that. They got drugs. If you know a crew then you can get drugs [...] all the kids in Yr 7 – all the black kids anyway – here they just end up getting involved in crews to stay safe and then end up taking drugs and that. You see them in Yr 7 already smoking cigarette and they think they are big already"*. It may have been especially important for Roxy to adopt practices such as 'blazing' in order to stay 'safe' because she was not blatantly anti-school and anti-education. However, she also realised the effects that drinking and especially smoking 'weed' had on her:

- Adam: *So what are the problems with smoking weed for you?*  
Roxy: *Like you find you forget things. Like you think – 'why am I forgetting that?' You think, it's bare weird... you don't have to smoke a lot for a long time.*  
Adam: *Did you notice it?*  
Roxy: *Yeah I noticed it and I see other people who still smoke weed loads now. They are dopey. They are dumber than they were a year ago.*  
Adam: *Why do people end up like that?*  
Roxy: *You get addicted to it. And you need it to go to sleep to relax and all that.*

Cannabis use may also play a role in managing school 'stress' for high-achieving students such as Roxy. Despite the risks, 'weed', 'drink' and 'pills' were a *"cheap [way] to get away from things"* she explained. The head of Year 10 also suggested that it was not unusual for students who were considered to be 'one of the better ones' to have been caught using drugs to relieve the pressure and stress associated with their GCSEs. She gave the following example:

*"One girl was caught recently sniffing solvents by her parents at home and she was the last person you would expect. People think you know which ones will be your future drug dealers and how many will do coke. With her it was pressure, pure and simple, she had a lot of expectations on her, from herself, her parents, the school and she had to find somewhere to escape it. She obviously couldn't raise it with anyone else so she dealt with herself by getting high – this was going on for a long time we now know. This wasn't done with groups of friends – it was an outlet to alleviate pressure".*

Taken together, the accounts of Leanne, Rosie, Amelia and Roxy suggested that smoking 'weed', using 'pills' and alcohol misuse were important markers of 'fitting in' with the 'safe', 'street' culture among black and dual-heritage girls both at Highbridge School and outside school. It may even be the case that it is *most important* for those students who are the



successful, high-achievers at school to smoke 'weed' and experiment with other drugs in order to maintain this 'safe' identity. In the following section, the accounts of two further girls are described in order to consider, firstly, how certain young people construct 'multiple' friendships and identities at school but, secondly, the constraints and limits on the other young people's capacity to *re-invent themselves* and distance themselves from potentially harmful cultures.

### Multiple identities: 'sweet' and 'safe'?

**Sabrina** was a black student who lived in an area in east London associated with high-levels of social and economic disadvantage and violent crime: *"there are bullets in my road from a shooting!"* She suggested that because she had grown-up in the area that *"it's just normal isn't it [laughing]!"* Several of the themes which emerged from her accounts of school-life were consistent with other students' views and experiences. She felt that school could be 'long' [boring]. She disliked some of the teaching practices at school and in particular, how teachers could 'abuse' their 'powers': *"they don't listen to us. All teachers like, all teachers are like a little group and they all stick up for each other, they don't listen to children"*. Although she embraced aspects of black, inner-city culture such as hip-hop fashions and the 'safe', 'street' dialect, Sabrina was an *exceptional case* among this sample of female students, in that she emphasised how she was also 'sweet' with other 'groups' and she actively 'avoided' clearly associating with only one 'crowd'. She explained: *"there's several different groups and I go and check them, check all of them"*. For example, she was 'sweet' with the (mainly white) 'little miss girlies' and the *"other white chicks"*, as well 'safe' with the black girls. At 'break-times', she would 'jam' with different groups and go to different 'places' around school.

According to Sabrina, cannabis use was 'normal' and even drugs such as 'crack' were *"nothing new in [her] year"*. However, she actively rejected smoking, drinking, 'weed' and other drug use. Although this qualitative case-study data cannot provide definitive answers as to how and/or why students can construct 'sweet' and 'safe' friendships and identities – or a 'swafe' identity as one teacher put it – and, in turn, how this may relate to the young people's attitudes and actions regarding drug use, Sabrina's views and experiences are instructive: firstly, her accounts suggest what actively rejecting drug use *meant* to her and *why* she had made these choices; and, secondly, aspects of her school-life at Highbridge appeared to *enable* her to form her relatively risk-free 'safe' and 'sweet' identity.

Sabrina appeared motivated to avoid drug use because she had prioritised school success (instead of being *"just hyper and having a joke all the time"*) and had long-term 'plans'. Her academic 'marks' during Year 10 were consistently good (*"around Bs and Cs and that"*), she had a clear idea which college she wanted to go to after her GCSEs and she had 'ambitions'

for the future: *"I want to do stuff with architecture... building houses and stuff like that – not really doing the blueprint – but how to make the houses that are built and let 'em out and stuff like that"*. She also appeared happy to take a relatively *long-term* perspective when forming her attitudes and making choices about her future. For instance, while school seemed 'long' she also reflected that getting married and having children were *"still a long way away anyway, if it comes it comes"*. Sabrina made connections between her motivation to do well at school and her lifestyle out of school:

- Adam: *What do you do on a weekend?*  
Sabrina: *Er, go out to the cinema maybe, go to my cousins [...]*  
Adam: *So you're not going' out raving?*  
Sabrina: *No that's the others, I'm not into them stuff.*  
Adam: *Really, you don't like music?*  
Sabrina: *Er, I'm not into raves and parties. I'm not onto that sort of thing. I only go to normal basic parties!*  
Adam: *What does that mean?*  
Sabrina: *Just simple, like music, food and that! I don't go shubs.*  
Adam: *What's 'shubs'?*  
Sabrina: *It's just raves and that*  
Adam: *You don't fancy that?*  
Adam: *I leave to that other people! I'm trying to concentrate on my work now.*

As reported in the previous section, other students in *"some of the top sets"* and who had clear 'ambitions' for the future were smoking 'weed' and using other drugs, such as Roxy, which suggests that this in itself may not be a 'protective' factor where students don't feel entirely safe and want to 'fit it'. By comparing Sabrina's accounts with other students, it appeared, however, that her participation and involvement in extra-curricular activities 'everyday' may have enabled her to form friendships with both 'safe' and 'sweet' 'groups' of students. She explained the benefits of participation in extra-curricular activities at school:

- Adam: *Do you feel like a part of this school?*  
Sabrina: *Yeah. I always after school do stuff – I used to do a lot of sports but that was when I was in Year seven and [Year] eight – I stopped that now – I still do cooking and kickboxing, mentoring. And the teacher takes us jogging if you get here early and that was actually good but the food weren't! You meet lots of people though.*  
Adam: *Do you find it useful to be involved with all this extra stuff?*  
Sabrina: *Yeah – very*  
Adam: *So basically most nights you do something 'extra curricular' after school?*  
Sabrina: *All nights I will do something after school!*

Her involvement in a wide range of activities before and after lessons may have also facilitated more positive and supportive relationships with some of her teachers and other staff at the school. When I interviewed her at the end of Year 10 Sabrina explained that she was 'bless' [on good terms with] with lots of her teachers and that she would *"talk to them and have jokes with them"* after school. While Sabrina appeared confident and able to combine her 'safe', 'street' styles and friendships with a 'sweet', healthy, pro-education

identity, another student, Michelle, appeared to feel 'stuck' with both her friends, who she realised were *"some of the worst ones"*, and her 'troublesome' identity which she seemed to resent. Michelle described herself in the interview as 'mixed race' and told me that she was *"one of the black people at school"*. She was known to the *"child protection police"* [social services] in her 'area' and had been in trouble with the police. Her accounts suggested that the most vulnerable young people at inner-city schools may sometimes have little (if any) access to 'resources' through which to construct a 'sweet' as well as 'safe' identity and that therefore their opportunities to reject drug use may be constrained (rather than enabled) by the school environment.

Her account of secondary school-life suggested that she 'needed' her friends and she appeared to have few other supportive relationships at school or outside. She was up front that she choose to speak 'slang' at school and to identify with the *"all black people"* (e.g. *"we just want to fit with everyone else basically, like even those who never used to speak slang are trying to speak slang now"*). Michelle knew that the school wasn't always safe (e.g. *"if I got money there's people who want to take it off you"*; *"someone shot me in the neck with a pellet gun"*, etc.). If you didn't want to be bullied it appeared vital to 'stick' with some of these 'really bad people':

*"[At Highbridge school] it depends how you portray yourself to those bullies – if you make yourself look like a weak fence or you're on your own, and don't stand up for yourself then they are gonna take the piss of you".*

Michelle's friendships and identity at school appeared to mean that while she was popular and 'safe', she was also seen as 'hyper' (disruptive) by the teachers, and was *"constantly in trouble"*. The following story about how she intervened in a fight between 'Turkish people' and 'black people' outside the school-gates illustrates how, compared to Sabrina, she had few positive extra-curricular 'resources' in order to improve her relationships with other 'groups' of young people and to impress the teachers:

*"Last week there was a big fight in the park over there and [the head, the deputy head and another teacher] was all standing by the gate watching this fight. [...] In the park there was Turkish people and black people. This black boy was fighting this Turkish boy. Then loads of us black people, came over to try and stop the fight and then we all got involved with the others. I tried to split up a fight – it didn't work – they kept on fighting. Then it got out of hand [and I] did not want anyone to get stabbed – I had to stop that – and it worked the way I stopped it! I set my dog on both of them! [...] It didn't bite no-one – and the other Turkish person calmed then.... I was like for fucks sake I told you to stop fighting. I was like what is your problem?"*

By attempting to *re-invent* herself and improve her relationships with other 'groups' of students in the context of school conflict her actions may have further limited her opportunities for teachers to understand 'what she is about'. 'Stuck' with the 'worst' (but safest) students, Michelle was smoking cannabis regularly by the start of year 10. When



discussing drug use she suggested that smoking cannabis was strongly associated with certain 'groups' at Highbridge:

*Adam: Are there any students here that smoke cannabis?*

*Michelle: I know the students that smoke cannabis.*

*Adam: Do you sometimes?*

*Michelle: Yeah.*

*Adam: What sort of students here are smoking cannabis?*

*Michelle: The ones that want to be cool – I would not say I am that cool. I am popular but not that cool. I am not that bothered about that exactly – I don't go like they go, like I am better than everyone else [...]*

*Adam: Who do you do this with then? On your own or with friends?*

*Michelle: With my friends, people who live round me, friends in school.*

Like Leanne and Rosie, Michelle was no longer attending the school when I returned to follow-up this first interview. Her accounts suggested that the most vulnerable young people at inner-city schools may have little (if any) access to 'resources' through which to construct a 'sweet' as well as 'safe' identity and that therefore their opportunities to reject drug use may be highly-constrained (rather than enabled) by the school environment

## Conclusion

It is important to emphasise that the majority of young people whom I interviewed at Highbridge School were *purposively* sampled because of their attitudes and behaviour at school in order to explore the experiences of some of the least engaged students. In particular, the actions and attitudes of the 'black kids' reported here are *not representative* of Afro-Caribbean and dual-heritage young people, either at this school or elsewhere. It is also important to emphasise that the senior management team and teaching staff were working in an *extremely* challenging context – for example, thirty per cent of pupils were deemed to have special educational needs – and, despite these challenges, the school appeared to 'add value' to some of its students (such as Jason and Sabrina).

This case-study suggests how a wide range of school policies and practices – relating to assessment, academic 'streaming', discipline, school safety, admissions and extra-curricular activities – and the wider policy context may both enable and constrain the ways in which young people form their attitudes about education and their future, 'choose' their friends and how this, in turn, relates to 'blazing' and other forms of drug use. The findings from this case-study suggest that inner-city secondary schools such as Highbridge may structure students health-related behaviours, particular cannabis use, through: (1) '*streaming*' and '*refusing*' *certain students*; (2) *students need for 'safe' identities based on markers of 'street' culture such as cannabis use*; and (3) '*hiding*' the issue of students' drug use and the availability of drugs in school.

Firstly, the data collected at Highbridge School suggested that *some of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable students were actively marginalised by the school's focus on improving overall levels of attainment in public examinations through the process of 'streaming' and 'refusing' certain students*. The teaching practices were 'designed', as one teacher put it, by the school management team to improve the school's position in the local education authority 'league tables'. At the same time, 'inclusion' and students' happiness did *not* appear to be as strong a priority. The accounts of students who were in the 'bottom sets' (officially known as the 'foundation stream') suggested that: they received little support; were de-motivated by the schools 'messages' about the primacy of GCSE achievement; and, they often held fatalistic attitudes about their futures by Year 10. In addition, 'stuck' with the 'worst ones', these students rarely formed many – if any – positive 'connections' with teachers and were frustrated that the school did not appreciate *where they were coming from*. Marginalised and angry about their experiences, education and school appeared to have little or no 'point' for these 'disengaged' young people, particularly compared to smoking cannabis, drinking experimenting with other drugs and 'jamming' [relaxing] with friends.

School 'refusal' was the buzz-word among the school management team and senior teachers when discussing 'chronic non-attenders' and the students who were 'placed' in 'referral', 'inclusion' and other alternative forms of educational provision. However, it appears that *schools themselves may be actively 'refusing' certain students* and, in turn, that this may contribute to contemporary inner-city youth 'chemical cultures' (Henderson et al, 2007). In particular, those young people who are not in education or training are likely to be engaging in 'risky' and potentially harmful behaviours to 'relax' and 'fill' their time. Additional learning support, mentoring, more interactive teaching strategies and a greater range of meaningful vocational 'options' in Year 10 are likely to be appropriate approaches to reduce disengagement through promoting positive relationships and 'inclusion'. More innovative and culturally-appropriate forms of education that enable individual learning but also revolve around young people's interests – such as sport, music and the arts – may also reduce disengagement. For example, Kyle's attitudes at the end of Year 10 strongly suggested that more positive relationships with the teachers and other adults, a greater number of vocational Key Stage 4 'options' and more interactive models of learning would have been critical in promoting his engagement at school and in raising his aspirations for the future. Teachers admitted that, at present, the school only provides BTEC courses as 'a failsafe measure' for students who are unlikely to achieve five 'good' GCSE passes to improve their overall 'figures' (because a BTEC qualification can be the equivalent of four GCSEs at grades A\*-C in the all-important school 'performance' tables).

Furthermore, some of the female students I interviewed appeared to be *too independent and 'grown up' to 'fit' into the school-regime and comply with the 'strict' rules, regulations and*

*priorities*, which they felt treated them too much like 'kids' and not enough like adults. Like at Park Grove, there were often contradictions between these students' imperfect biographies and the school's 'delusions of perfection'. Unwilling (and probably unable) to re-invent themselves as 'kids' for their teachers, these students' experiences of school were characterised by unhappiness, high-levels of unauthorised absences, frequent school moves and periods of 'referral' and 'exclusion'. With few positive 'resources' at Highbridge, Amelia formed her closest friendships – and did her identity-work – outside of school in 'risky' settings which allowed her greater freedom and opportunities to express her maturity. This suggests that schools – and educational policies more generally – need to accept that some girls are 'growing up fast' and make greater efforts to include, support and involve these students in school-life, rather than marginalising them. For example, supporting these young people and their parents is likely to be more effective and appropriate than just threatening them with fines and/or sending 'letters'.

Secondly, although educational marginalisation may be a key driver of drug use and 'harm' for some students, this is not to say that doing 'well' at school and having a clear 'plan'/'ambitions' for the future necessarily 'protected' young people against cannabis and other drug use at Highbridge school. It also appeared that ***students needed to adopt 'identities' based on markers of 'street' culture such as cannabis use in order to stay 'safe' in school.*** Despite the school's attempts to maintain 'order', students consistently reported that the school was not always a 'safe' place. They were routinely worried about bullying, fighting, getting their phones and money 'jacked' and 'being rushed'. Black and dual heritage students appeared to form large ethno-centric school 'social networks', based on lots of 'safe' relational ties, and smoking 'weed' appeared to be an important source of 'bonding' and marker of group membership within these networks.

Where 'safe' students' drug use escalates the pathways are likely to be complex and inter-relate to the process of disengagement and marginalisation described above. For example, in some cases a 'vicious circle' appeared to exist whereby the process of 'fitting in' with 'safe groups' led to difficult and conflicting relationships with teachers, further disengagement and further cannabis use as 'there's no reason not to'. Furthermore, where these young people's relationships with their parents became stressful – again possibly through their identification with certain peer groups, and/or as a result of teachers 'reports' of them – 'blazing' may also function as a form of 'escape'. However, there also appeared to be *a diffusion of 'safe' identity-work based on cannabis and other drug use beyond the most disengaged students*: cannabis use appeared to be an equally (if not more) important 'safety strategy' and source of 'bonding' for pro-education students who needed to be seen 'getting high' as well as 'aiming high'.



This diffusion of 'safe' identities within the context of inner-city secondary schools – through which there then appears to be a diffusion of 'innovations', ideas and practices relating to drug use – has implications in terms of a school's policies and practices relating to students' safety, as well as current admissions policies and the provision of extra-curricular activities. Highbridge's attempts to improve *school safety*, such as deploying police officers on the school site, may reassure some parents and satisfy Ofsted inspectors but it did *not* reassure the students who were interviewed in this study. This suggests that inner-city schools need to consult students and identify more appropriate and effective strategies to improve school safety. Students' experiences of Highbridge School in Year 7 often appeared to have been crucial in determining their concerns about staying 'safe' and therefore improving students 'transitions' to secondary school may be particularly important.

Furthermore, several of the students' accounts suggested that they found these initial experiences difficult and 'scary' because they didn't know many (if any) other young people from either their primary school or their 'area' when they 'turned up'. As well as being 'segregated' together at the 'least popular' inner-city schools such as Highbridge (Burgess et al, 2005), black and other ethnic minority young people from low-income families appear to sometimes arrive at secondary school in London with few close friends from primary school, probably as the result of current *school admissions policies*. In addition, Sabrina's 'sweet' and 'safe' identity suggested that where young people are involved in a wide range of *extra-curricular activities* this may facilitate more positive opportunities for staying 'safe', healthy identity-work and improving student-teacher relationships.

Thirdly, the comments of *both* the teachers and students at Highbridge suggested that ***the school largely ignored students' cannabis use and tried to 'hide', rather than address, the issue of drugs being sold on the premises***. The school's management team's appeared focussed on: raising overall, 'headline' levels of attainment; 'fundraising' to improve the school's physical infrastructure; and avoiding any 'bad publicity'. This makes sense in terms of the (national and local) policy and political environment. To put it bluntly, there is no 'league table' for students' drugs 'literacy'. Moreover, high-profile drugs education and prevention strategies can concern parents and increase official scrutiny (Bauld et al, 2004). The result at Highbridge appeared to be an unhealthy combination of: a low level of understanding (and misunderstandings) about the risks and harms associated with certain drugs; and relatively easy access to drugs in school.

Like at Park Grove School, the students I interviewed at Highbridge had not received adequate drugs education. In particular, misunderstandings and myths about the effects of cannabis were common. For example, students views about the 'risks' associated with cannabis use included concerns that certain types of cannabis were "*highly addictive*", that "*it stops you having dreams when you're asleep*" but that "*by eating first you can't get stoned*".

The teachers I spoke to recognised that the current drugs education provision in tutor-group 'time' and occasional 'drop days' to communicate important messages about drugs were insufficient. In addition to cannabis, some students were clearly coming into contact with a wide range of potentially harmful illegal drugs, as well as alcohol, and they were often learning about these drugs on the 'streets'.

There was also a clear consensus that some students 'shot' [sold] cannabis in school and that it was easy to buy drugs in, and nearby, the school. However, the school management team also appeared reluctant to address the issue of 'dealing' in school. Aside from positioning police officers in the canteen at lunchtime, there was no evidence to suggest that the school was making a determined effort to prevent (or even reduce) students access to cannabis and other substances while at school. Once again, it may not be in a school's interest to publicise and tackle such problems. 'Fresh-started' post-1997, Highbridge school's most recent GCSE results mean that its future is once again uncertain. It may be closed and 're-branded' again, this time with academy status. In this context, it is likely to make more sense for head teachers to 'hide' the problem rather than developing partnerships with outside agencies and launching high-profile initiatives which may generate further unwanted publicity and threats of closure.

Finally, although students' practices such as 'blazing' are likely to be social and cultural 'expressions' of poverty and social exclusion (Bourgois, 2003) and relate to existing 'street-based' practices' and identities (MacDonald and Marsh, 2005), this case-study suggests that ***inner-city schools may both reflect and reproduce existing patterns of drug use in their localities and reinforce 'ethnic' divisions in drug-related harm.*** Like Willis' 'lads' (1977), these young people were 'creative actors', responding to their experiences of a 'constraining' institution and expressing agency in developing their friendships. Black and dual-heritage boys, in particular, felt that they needed to adopt 'tough' postures to find a 'safe' position at school. However, in 'conforming' to these existing cultural identities, students' actions at secondary schools are likely to reproduce patterns of inequality regarding educational, economic and health outcomes. Schools may also be re-producing 'cultures of violence' in inner-city areas (Henderson et al, 2007) as students need to adopt 'tough fronts' and 'fight' to stay safe at secondary school.

In the final chapter (**Chapter 7**) these findings are presented alongside the findings from the Park Grove case-study and the systematic review.

## Chapter 7. Summary and discussion

### Introduction

Firstly, the findings of both the systematic review and the case-study research are summarised in this chapter. Secondly, the limitations of both research components are then discussed. Thirdly, building on the conceptual framework outlined in Chapter 2, a theory of how young people's actions relating to drug use may be structured in the context of secondary schools is outlined. Finally, the implications for policy and practice are discussed and recommendations are made for further research.

### Summary of main results

The first aim of this study was to synthesise the existing longitudinal quantitative evidence on school effects on drug use in order to assess whether schools appear to *influence* young people's drug use and by what possible *mechanisms* any such influences might occur. The rationale for this was that, despite the considerable policy interest in 'whole-school' interventions to prevent and/or reduce student drug use, the evidence regarding school influences on young people's drug use had not been systematically reviewed. The **systematic review** thus fills an important research gap by synthesising existing high-quality quantitative studies *examining school effects* on young people's drug use, as well as exploring possible causal mechanisms for this, by drawing on both studies of school effects and studies exploring *associations* between individuals' experiences of, and attitudes to, school and their drug use. The key findings are summarised below.

*What effects do whole-school drug prevention interventions have on young people's attitudes to and use of drugs, through which mechanisms and in which contexts?*

Despite the limited number of studies and their narrow theoretical basis, existing intervention studies from the USA suggest that action to improve school ethos, to support student engagement and to foster positive relationships can have positive effects in reducing drug use. The D.A.R.E. plus and Aban Aya youth project evaluations both suggest that changes to the school social environment are accompanied by a reduction of student drug use compared to the comparison group. The lack of effects reported for girls may have been due to a lack of power because these outcomes were rarer among girls or because school-level changes did not address types of indirect aggressive behaviours, such as spreading rumours and less physical forms of bullying which have been found to be more common among girls, and so may have had a limited impact on key institutional determinants of substance use among girls. Furthermore, students' *early experiences* of secondary/high school appear to be particularly influential: the Aban Aya and D.A.R.E. plus interventions



may have had more substantial effects on students' substance use than the Gatehouse project (Australia) because they targeted younger pupils. The initial results of the Gatehouse trial did not attain statistical significance, however, the intervention was delivered when students were aged 13/14 and may have *already* been disaffected and disillusioned with secondary school. This possibility receives support from the findings of the follow-up study conducted four years after the trial which found that there was a statistically significant protective effect for subsequent cohorts of new students at Gatehouse schools compared to schools in the control group for a composite measure of health risk behaviours.

*Which factors related to school-level organisation, the school environment and young people's individual-level school-related attitudes and behaviours are associated with young people's use of drugs, and how are these relationships mediated?*

Observational studies suggest that a positive ethos and higher overall levels of school engagement and positive teacher-student relationships are associated with lower rates of drug use. Individual-level observational studies consistently reported that school disengagement and poor teacher-student relationships are associated with drug use and other risky health behaviours. There is also evidence that participation in extra-curricular activities and other forms of involvement at school might lie on a causal pathway between disengagement and drug use. Truancy, suspension from school and frequent changes of school are also associated with drug use. Based on the studies included in the systematic review a plausible explanation regarding the *processes* through which schools may influence drug use is that at schools which are less inclusive and where there are few opportunities to be involved and participate in extra-curricular activities, students may not feel part of their school nor form the supportive relationships they need with teachers and, in turn, may become dissatisfied with, and disengaged from, school and more likely to use drugs. However, it was also clear that the quantitative research reviewed could not fully unpick the extended and complex causal pathways involved.

The second aim of the thesis was to use qualitative research to explore how young people experience school, how these experiences vary according to social background, gender, ethnicity and level of engagement, and the processes through which any school effects on young people's attitudes and actions relating to drug use may occur. The rationale for this aim was that the *social processes* through which these potential school effects may occur are *under-researched* and *under-theorised*. The case-study research therefore complements the evidence from experimental and school-level longitudinal observational studies which suggest there are *school effects* on rates of drug use and other health-related behaviours. While the case-studies cannot provide further evidence of *school effects*, the qualitative data provides the opportunity to explore: how institutional features may lead to 'poor ethos', disengagement and drug use, and the *social processes* through which any

effects may occur; and the dual role of institutional and social *structures* and young people's *agency* in these processes. The case-study research also provides insights regarding students' gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status, and other personal factors which are unlikely to be fully captured by quantitative data. The key findings are summarised below.

*How do students describe their experiences of secondary school, school policies and practices, and the overall school culture? How do these accounts vary between students regarded by teachers as more or less engaged with school?*

Among *both more and less engaged students*, it appeared to be important for young people to 'find' a 'group' to belong to at secondary school. This appeared to be a response to the pressures of school and the need to stay 'safe'. Students often did their identity-work in school to *facilitate group bonding and to differentiate themselves from other 'groups'*. It was also apparent that school staff were under pressure to improve the school's 'results' – in terms of their students' academic attainment at Key Stage 4 – and that this focus on individual assessment, in turn, influenced students' experiences of school. Both case-study schools appeared to take a fairly *cynical* view of promoting 'standards' based on students' attainment in public examinations: by *targeting* academic and 'key marginal' students schools may be actively marginalising and refusing some of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable young people. For those students in the 'foundation' (bottom) sets school's 'message' about the primacy of academic attainment appeared to be associated with further disengagement and lower expectations for the future. Furthermore, school disciplinary policies and practices appeared to be designed to isolate and contain these least-engaged, and potentially disruptive, students and, in turn, to further entrench school disengagement and low expectations for some students. Stress and anxiety were also recurring themes in students' accounts of school-life, both for more and less engaged students.

*How do students describe: (1) their 'identity'; and (2) their attitudes and actions in relation to drug use? How do these accounts differ between students?*

School peer group formation and identities appeared to relate to young people's attitudes and actions regarding drug use. Young people actively formed their friendship groups based on their experiences and 'position' at secondary school and the strategies they need to 'survive' and, in turn, the adoption or rejection of 'risky' behaviours such as drug use appear to be crucial to these groups' identities in school. School social networks therefore may be an important potential *mediator* between the school environment and students' drug use, and differences in the size, pattern and identity of school social networks may explain variations between schools in terms of their health profiles and the effects they have on patterns and rates of drug use. In 'high-achieving' schools, such as Park Grove, substance use may be an *extremely important and strong source of bonding and identity* for a minority

of disengaged, 'counter-school' students. In 'rough'/tough' inner-city schools, such as Highbridge, there may also be a *diffusion* of 'safe' identities based on cannabis use and other 'street' practices and styles through larger, more diffuse 'safe' networks. Furthermore, when young people cannot find the friendships and identities they want in school they may find social and symbolic belonging in *even more risky networks and settings outside school*.

*What connections (if any) do young people make between their experience of school, their identity-work and their attitudes to and actions concerning drug use?*

In addition to these links between education policies, school practices, and the formation of students' peer groups in school, young people also made connections between their identity, attitude and actions at school *and* their attitudes and actions relating to drug use. Among those young people who were most *disengaged* from school and with limited 'plans' for the future, cannabis and other drug use appears to be a logical response and provide these students with: an attainable marker of status and progress; the opportunity to 'have a laugh'; a source of 'solace' (Cameron and Jones, 1985) to relieve the pressures of school; and, in some cases, appeared to provide an 'excuse' for 'bad marks' and allow a more passive (or 'mellow') form of resistance to school. Drug use may also be a coping mechanism used to reduce anxiety about school work and other aspects of school-life for both more and less disengaged students. Furthermore, when young people are relying on heavy 'skunk' use as *a functional means of 'escaping' school problems* this may be associated with a greater risk of mental health problems, and escalating use and experimentation with other more 'problematic' drugs as they seek to find new ways of coping (Boys and Marsden, 2003).

*What other inter-connections are apparent between school policies, practices and ethos and young people's attitudes, experiences, identities and actions as these relate to drug use?*

Certain schools may be actively 'hiding' problems such as drug use and students access to drugs in school. In particular, there appear to be few incentives for schools to provide high-quality drugs education, and at schools which are likely to have high levels of drug use the school management team may feel that it is in their interest to 'hide', rather than systematically tackle, the issue of drug use and students access to drugs in school. High-profile prevention and harm-reduction strategies in these schools may generate further unwanted publicity, alarm parents (and potential parents) and further increase local and national political scrutiny.

Taken together, this research: identifies potential 'school effects' on drug use at a *population-level* (through the findings of the systematic review); highlights the *mechanisms* via which secondary schools may structure young people's drug use (through the findings of the systematic review and case-study research); and, provides further insights regarding the



dual role of students' *agency* and institutional and other social *structures*, such as gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status (through the case-study research). These findings further highlight the limitations of existing theoretical concepts which have been used to understand potential school effects on drug use and, as such, emphasise the need to *look beyond psycho-social concepts*. A theory of how secondary schools may 'structure' drug use – and reproduce health, as well as social and economic, inequalities – and the implications of this work are discussed later in this chapter (after the limitations of this study are outlined, below).

## **Limitations of the systematic review**

### *Limitations of the existing research*

Only a limited number of intervention studies were identified (N=4). These programmes varied widely in their scope and they all, to some extent, combined components which addressed the 'whole school' with individual-focused curriculum components, such as social development or health education. It is therefore difficult to know whether effects on drug use that are reported are the result of the former or the latter components. Inconsistencies in the measures used make it impossible to establish whether overall whole-school interventions have smaller or greater effects on drug use than those reported for more conventional drug-prevention education intervention as reported in recent systematic reviews (Tobler et al, 2000; Faggiano et al, 2005). However, D.A.R.E. Plus (Perry et al, 2003), which did include the whole-school components alongside curriculum components, was found to have a greater effect on drug use than was the original D.A.R.E. intervention which lacked the whole-school elements; suggesting that whole-school modification may be causally linked to rates of drug use. Nonetheless, in the absence of further studies to confirm whether whole-school elements are indeed an 'active ingredient' we must be cautious in our conclusions about causal relations between whole-school modifications and rates of student drug use.

Although the observational studies identified as of 'high quality' did adjust for major potential confounders, these may still have been subject to unmeasured confounding. For example, confounding may have occurred due to aspects of young people's background which were not measured and controlled for, such as parenting styles or unmeasured baseline non-health risk behaviours. With respect to the observational studies of student-level exposures, although such individual-level factors as school disengagement may be affected by school-level characteristics they may also reflect non-school factors such as problems at home.

The systematic review was also dominated by studies carried out in the USA and these findings may not be generalisable to other settings, although the findings of two high-quality studies – one experimental and one observational – which were *not* carried out in the USA

were broadly consistent with the overall pattern of results (Bond et al, 2004; West et al, 2004). All the studies reviewed make comparisons between schools in *the same country*. There will therefore be less variation in school management and ethos among schools because of the role of national education policy. As such, this systematic review cannot assess any 'ecological effects' on rates of drug use which may occur through modifying national education policies. Furthermore, the intervention studies focused on relatively minor changes to school's organisation and management rather than more gross policy or institutional transformation and so the effects found are unlikely to match the effects of such larger changes.

#### *Limitations of the review methods*

A limitation of all reviews is their reliance on authors' descriptions of the interventions or exposures under study, and how the findings are presented in published reports and papers. In particular, measures of effect sizes were reported inconsistently across studies, and in some cases the effect sizes were not reported. In such cases, P-values were used to indicate the statistical significance of association. However, it is important to note that in some cases multiple tests of significance within papers may have resulted in some apparent associations having arisen due to *chance*. The lack of adjustment for 'clustering' in two of the experimental/quasi-experimental studies (Cuijpers et al, 2002; Perry et al, 2003) may also have meant that some of the intervention effects were *over-estimated*.

Furthermore, despite the inclusion of observational studies, the systematic review can only provide some crude indications of causal processes and it is certainly not clear how these school-related factors interact and influence young people's actions, or how these school effects differ across different groups of young people. This is likely to be an inevitable limitation given the difficulty of examining extended, complex chains and cycles of causation merely via quantitative research with its attendant problems of statistical power and measurement error. Furthermore, in isolation from reports of lived experience, these ideas are *depersonalised*. For example, students who are disengaged from school are *not* a homogenous group. The case-study research provides further insight regarding factors, such as students' gender, ethnicity and social disadvantage, as well as even more personal factors unlikely to be captured by quantitative data, to explore their influence in these processes.

#### **Limitations of the case-study research**

There are a number of limitations in relation to the case-study research. Above all, the case-studies were based on interviews with a relatively *small sample* of students and teachers at only *two schools* and supplemented with contextual data which was *illustrative* rather than

comprehensive. Although the qualitative data collected is highly instructive for generating theoretical insights and for identifying priorities for further research, these two case-study schools are *not representative of British secondary schools and the findings may not therefore be generalisable*. The fact that both case-study schools were in London may also mean that certain aspects of these schools composition/admissions and students' social networks at these schools are the 'exception' rather than the 'norm'. Furthermore, the majority of students were selected *purposively* in order to explore the view and experiences of students considered by teachers to be 'disengaged' with school. Although other students were also interviewed to include the views of a wider range of students and to explore their experiences, attitudes and actions, this study only offers limited insights into how schools may have effects on drug use among those students who are not 'disengaged'. For example, *further research is needed to understand how mechanisms such as 'stress' and anxiety at school may determine drug use more widely, such as among pro-education and middle-class students*.

There are also potential limitations with the (1) reliability and (2) validity of the qualitative data collected. Firstly, in terms of the *reliability* of the data, *the length and depth of interviews varied*. Overall, those students whose interviews lasted longest were those who had the strongest views about school and this may have provided an uneven and potentially biased overall 'picture'. Although, all the young people who participated were happy to do so and consented to taking part (and 'miss a lesson!'), using vouchers from high street stores, such as HMV and Boots, may have the advantage of rewarding all young people more equally for their time and co-operation. Furthermore, although standard questions were asked about young people's family structure, whom they lived with and where, some students talked in much more detail about their families and their 'area' than others and therefore *the 'quality' of data regarding young people's family background and neighbourhood characteristic varied considerably*.

Secondly, in terms of the *validity* of the data, despite the information they had about how the data would be used, young people may have been worried about disclosing information *in school* and this may have affected how willing some students were to talk in-depth and honestly. For instance, some students may have been reluctant to discuss sensitive issues, negative experiences of school and their attitudes and actions relating to drug use. Interviews were occasionally interrupted and this interfered with the 'flow' of these interviews and may have further increased young people's concerns about being 'heard' or 'found out'. Similarly, some teachers may have also been reluctant to discuss sensitive issues, such as cases of 'bad practice' and their more critical opinions of the school's culture, policies and management, despite the guarantee of confidentiality and anonymity. Alternatively, some students (and teachers) may have *exaggerated* or *embellished* aspects of their accounts in order to 'impress' an 'outsider', appear more grown-up and to undertake further identity-work



in the interview. Although the process of triangulation helps to increase confidence in the validity of the findings and was particularly instructive for understanding some aspects of the school environment through analysing both students' and teachers' common experiences (e.g. school safety), students' accounts of activities such as drug use could not be *cross-examined* through teachers accounts or my observations.

An additional limitation was the problem of 'attrition'. Not all students could be re-interviewed at the end of the Year 10. At Park Grove School one student (Josh) refused to be interviewed for a second time because he could not be 'bothered' and a further two students who had been excluded during Year 10 (Nadine and Jerome) did not respond to letters sent to their parents addresses and therefore could not be re-interviewed. However, one student who left Park Grove during Year 10 on a 'work experience'/college placement (Jaz) was re-interviewed at the end of Year 10 at her college. At Highbridge School, four of the fourteen students interviewed at the start of Year 10 were no longer in school by the end of Year 10 and were not re-interviewed despite efforts to contact them. As a result, this study provides only relatively limited data about students' attitudes and actions relating to drug use *once they have been excluded, or excluded themselves, from school* and therefore further research is needed to understand these young people's experience and how this may relate to their health-related behaviours such as drug use. A lesson for future prospective qualitative research with young people is that it is important to collect detailed contact information, including mobile telephone numbers and email addresses, where young people are happy to provide that information; high street vouchers may also be useful as an incentive for young people to participate in 'follow-up' interviews.

There are also two key areas through which schools may influence and structure young people's drug use (and other health-related behaviours) but which were *not systematically explored* through the data collection methods and which therefore merit further research. Firstly, young people's social networks appear to be important potential mediators but *were not systematically mapped and explored in this study*. For example, detailed data was not collected about students' 'relational ties' in school and the dynamics of young people's social networks, such as brokerage and diffusion, were not explored. The collection and analysis of socio-metric data is a priority to further understand school effects on young people's drug use (and other health 'risk' behaviours) and this is discussed in more detail in the final section of this chapter. Furthermore, although individual interviews are the 'safest' environment to explore issues such as problems at school (e.g. bullying) and drug use (Michell, 1999), 'natural' focus groups with 'groups' of school friends are also needed to explore students *shared experiences* at school and how this relates to students' actions and attitudes relating to drug use. Secondly, the focus of the case-study research was to explore schools from *the point of view of young people themselves* and, despite the information provided by teachers and my observations, this research provides limited information about

how schools are managed and how institutional policies and practices relate to school 'ethos' and other features of school life.

Finally, it is important to reiterate that the quantitative data synthesised in the systematic review partly informed the qualitative data collection and analysis (rather than vice versa) in order to explore at a micro-level the 'bigger picture' earlier presented. An inevitable limitation is therefore that research questions and design of the case-study research were informed by pre-conceived concepts from non-UK studies which may not be appropriate for studying young people's experiences of school and drug use in the UK. For example, the concept of 'whole-school ethos' may be problematic for examining heterogeneous groups of students' varied experiences of school or, perhaps, for understanding the ways in which schools operate in the UK. However, in analyzing qualitative data the question of whether these might challenge concepts derived from quantitative studies of secondary school effects on drug use was considered. Furthermore, although in this doctoral research the quantitative preceded and informed the qualitative, it is anticipated that in my future research such as on school ethos interventions and social networks (see below) findings from this thesis' qualitative case studies will be used to inform quantitative research.

## **Discussion**

Despite these limitations, the case-study research provides a unique opportunity to go beyond existing psycho-social concepts, build on the sociological theories and empirical studies described in Chapter 2 and outline a *wider theory of how young people's attitudes and actions relating to drug use may be structured by schools*, and how this is likely to differ according to students' family background, gender, ethnicity and other factors. This section begins by *building this theory* and the implications of this study for further research, policy and practice are then discussed.

### ***School influences on young people's drug use: structuration in action***

Thirty years after Paul Willis' seminal study *Learning to Labour*, schools continue to be an important site for the reproduction of social and cultural inequality. Both case-studies exemplified how schools reflect aspects of their intake and 'locality', shape young people's attitudes and actions and how these actions ultimately reinforce 'difference' and existing structures. However, the way in which institutional features of secondary schools reinforce and reproduce inequality has been significantly *re-structured* since Willis' 'Hammertown' ethnography. Whereas schools once reproduced divisions in the labour force in Britain, it appears that risks and harms related to drug use may now be structured by schools following transformations to: (1) the significance of social class and community as a basis for young people's friendship groups, identities and transitions to adulthood; (2) the 'rules' which

govern the British secondary school system; and (3) the role of drug use as a 'resource' for young people's identity-work.

Firstly, the economic, social and cultural basis for young people's collective identity-work and transitions to adulthood has been *transformed* in 'late modernity', a process which has been well-documented elsewhere (Giddens, 1990; Willis, 1990; Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; McRobbie, 2000; Henderson et al, 2007) and is described in detail in Chapter 2. Young people are no longer divided up and identified so clearly by their social class and the neighbourhoods in which they live, certainly not compared to the working-class 'lads' and the middle-class 'ear'oles' studied by Willis (1977). The dynamics of gender and youth have also been transformed: young women are no longer only expected to take up the 'roles' of wife and mother after leaving school (McRobbie, 2000) and drug use is now an alternative 'resource' for girls' identity construction (Measham, 2002). Both schools studied were characterised by *heterogeneity* in terms of students' social backgrounds, the communities from which they were 'coming from' and students' peer groups. This is not to say that the young people studied by Willis and McRobbie in the West Midlands in the 1970s were not creative actors: *they were*. Nor is it to say that inequality has been removed: *it persists but in reconstructed ways*. The point is: ***young people are now much more 'atomised' – with fewer strong bonds and common sources of belonging – as they enter secondary school and have less certainty about their identity and transitions to adulthood.***

Secondly, schools themselves have been *transformed* following market-orientated reforms (described in Chapter 2). As the case-study data illustrated, secondary schools are now 'designed' and 'tested' according to their *effectiveness* at preparing their students for public examinations and this increases the importance of strategically dividing-up, 'sorting' and 'excluding' students. While schools are also judged in terms of 'exclusions' they appear to respond to this through using alternative strategies for 'excluding' students, either 'internally' or through referring students to alternative education providers and using ad hoc 'work experience' placements. Taken alongside macro-level social and cultural transformations, ***the way in which students form their friendships and group 'identities' in the context of secondary school has been reconstructed*** as a result of these education policies and secondary school practices. While achievement and engagement have always been a source of constraint and division in schools (Willis, 1997; McRobbie, 1978), students' academic achievement and their level of engagement may now be *the key source of constraint and division*, and as such the school's role in the reproduction of social stratification may have been strengthened. In particular, school experiences appear to *amplify* unhappiness and low expectations among young people from the most disadvantaged and dysfunctional families who cannot be passive and 'perfect' at school (because of their independence and non-child identity outside school) and for whom the burden of failure and punishment falls most heavily and most often. As a result of the



demand for year-on-year improvements in 'results' and the threat of sanctions for 'failing' schools, the surveillance, management and refusal of these 'disengaged' students appears to have become more strategic and harsher than ever. Like the modern criminal justice system, the process of 'discipline and punishment' in schools may also have evolved over time in response to the need to *punish better* (Foucault, 1975).

Furthermore, in this context of greater uncertainty and 'self-definition', young people may be further *constrained* by potentially dangerous school environments. Reflecting on the ways in which we construct our identity in 'late modernity', Zygmunt Bauman (2004 p. 69) has suggested that we are now often forced to "replace the few depth relationships with a mass of thin and shallow contacts [and] we painfully miss the safety nets which the true networks of kinship, friends and brothers-in-fate used to provide matter of factly". This resonates with the pressure for students to join 'safe' peer groups at Highbridge School and the shape and identity of students' social networks at the school. Once again, it is most likely to be those young people who are *most disadvantaged and marginalised*, and with the most uncertain futures, who will need to form these communities in the most dangerous and least popular schools – although there may also be a 'diffusion' of cannabis use and other markers of 'street' subcultures *in these 'unsafe' school environments*.

Thirdly, as class-based and community-based solidarity and identity have diminished and been replaced by identities based on 'youth lifestyles' and patterns of consumption (Johansson and Miegel, 1992; Miles, 2000), ***drug use – and especially cannabis use – is an important source of cultural expression and bonding for secondary school students***. This is to say, drug use *makes sense* for many young people in terms of the opportunities and identities 'available' to them during secondary school. Drawing on more than twenty-five years of experience researching and theorizing about young people, culture and society, Paul Willis (2003 p. 461) has emphasised that that young people continue to be *defiant, creative actors* who actively respond to the education system, the labour market and other features of modern society: *"young people respond in disorganised and chaotic ways, but to the best of their abilities with relevance to the actual possibilities of their lives as they see, live and embody them"*. Drug use was a creative and active part of the identity-work undertaken by many of the young people whom I interviewed and it could provide an alternative marker of status and belonging for groups of students from low-income and chaotic families who were disconnected from academic markers of status and progress during secondary school. Like Willis' 'lads', the 'hyper girls' (as they identified themselves) formed a distinctive anti-school, counter-cultural group characterised by opposition to the values and norms perpetuated throughout the school and their drug use was a key element through which they differentiated themselves from the 'school stars'. For students with little interest in academic work, 'blazing' also provides an opportunity to 'have a laugh', 'escape'

the stress of school and humiliation of not doing well academically and can offer them a passive – more ‘mellow’ – form of resistance.

The qualitative data also provided important insights into *how the meaning and functions of drug use relates to students’ gender and ethnicity styles*, as well social disadvantage. In addition to ‘fighting, fucking and football’ (Mac an Ghaill, 1994), ‘blazing’ can be a further source of resistance to school for ‘macho’ boys, generally from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds, as part of contemporary subcultures based on Hip Hop and ‘street’ styles – perhaps even an *alternative* source of resistance for some black and dual heritage students. The teachers also appeared to misunderstand and unfairly ‘label’ some of the boys who adopted street-savvy ‘styles’ as a source of identity and a safety strategy. Another recent qualitative study in secondary schools in London, exploring Caribbean young people’s social capital, transitions and identities, also found that many black students felt excluded and that they had experienced direct racial discrimination based on the ‘company they keep’ (Reynolds, 2007). It has also been suggested that the concept of ‘institutional racism’, while giving a name to the process of differentiation and discrimination at a school-level, has actually served to ignore the *motives* regarding decisions to exclude black and other ethnic minority students and the issue of *accountability* (Parsons et al, 2005).

At the same time, girls have ‘caught up’ with the boys since the later 1980s in terms of *overall rates* of drug use (Currie et al, 2004; Fuller, 2004) and the case-study research suggests that ‘blazing’ and other drug use is an important source of ‘stress relief’ and bonding for girls seeking to resist school’s delusions of ‘perfection’ and find a ‘space’ to express their maturity. A study of young people’s drug use carried out in Australia also suggested that substance use has a *highly meaningful role* in not only young women’s social lives but also their *group bonding* (Sheehan and Ridge, 2001). In contrast to the work of Paul Willis and other male-dominated cultural theories, Angela McRobbie (1980 p.45) once described how young women were forced to relinquish youth for the premature middle-age induced by childbirth and housework: “It is not so much that girls do too much too young; rather they have the opportunity of doing too little too late”. Although she acknowledged that “the ‘freedom’ to consume alcohol and chemicals, to sniff glue and hang about on the street staking out symbolic territories is scarcely less oppressive than the pressures keeping girls in the home”, she did suggest substance use “could have a positive meaning for girls who are pushed from early adolescence into achieving their feminine status through acquiring a ‘steady’ [boyfriend]”. There is little doubt that girls are now actively and creatively adopting drug-use practices as part of their ‘feminine’ styles in order to emphasise their maturity but this is likely to be further source of ‘harm’ for some young women. The danger is that accounts of women’s ‘agency’ are *misread* as evidence of women having power and control equivalent to that of men (Maher, 1997).

In summary, following these social and structural transformations, some secondary schools may now be key sites for the reproduction of risk and harm relating to drug use – although this appears to vary according to the school ‘ethos’ (Chapter 4). Young people are actively choosing to take these ‘risks’ but they are doing so in a highly-constraining social and institutional environment. With fewer sources of identity and less certainty about their future, and in the context of a highly competitive, performance-driven and divisive school system, the most socially and economically worst-off young people are marginalised at school. Young people are actively ‘harming themselves’ and reproducing wider patterns of inequality, like Willis’ ‘lads’, *but – also like Willis’ lads – this is a cultural response to school-institutional features and wider structural processes.*

### ***Implications for policy, practice and further research***

Drawing on the findings of the systematic review and the case-study research, and the theory advanced above, this thesis concludes with a discussion of the:

- implications for UK education policies;
- the potential of school-level ‘structural’ interventions to reduce adolescent substance use;
- the scope for further research examining the mediating effects of school social networks on young people’s health.

### ***Implications for UK education policies***

Although the systematic review cannot provide evidence regarding the effects of national education policies on rates of drug use (because all the studies reviewed make comparisons between schools in *the same country*), ***the case-study research suggests that current policies and practices in the UK relating to (1) ‘league tables’, (2) the secondary-school curriculum, (3) ‘streaming’ and (4) ‘admissions’ should be reviewed in the light of their potentially harmful effects on young people’s attitudes and actions relating to drug use.*** While not *representative* of schools nationally, the case-study schools are not *atypical* of other secondary schools and therefore it is important to consider the apparent influence of national education policies and how these may structure students’ drug use.

It was been previously suggested that secondary school ***‘league tables’*** – based on overall levels of attainment – have been ‘misused’, ‘misunderstood’ and have not significantly improved learning or achievement (Plewis, 1998; Gillborn and Youdell, 2000; Mizen, 2000; Ball, 2003). The qualitative data collected in this study further suggests that secondary schools’ *prioritisation* of ‘results’ in public examinations can be an extremely unhappy and de-motivating experience for students *and that, in turn, this may ‘structure’ and reproduce*



*patterns of drug-related risk and harm among young people.* The emphasis is now on 'value added' but schools are still likely to prioritise their most academic and/or 'key marginal' pupils. The introduction of value-added measures may even have *further strengthened the importance of tracking, monitoring and excluding students from the least 'perfect' backgrounds who are further alienated by these practices.* For example, it has been reported that schools are now making use of psychometric tests to predict bad behaviour and negative attitudes to education (Anushka, 2007). Furthermore, despite this new emphasis on value-added 'scores', parents – as 'consumers' – may continue to focus on the publication of schools 'crude' levels of attainment and as such many heads may therefore also continue to focus on this in order to attract the 'cream of the crop'.

***If school 'league tables' are here to stay then they need to be reconstructed to promote, rather than inhibit, inclusion.*** It may be possible to 'reconstruct' measures of 'effectiveness' in terms of a school's success at 'retaining' all young people in education and training throughout secondary school which could potentially re-orientate schools priorities in favour of engaging and supporting more at-risk students. However, a 'single' national indicator, such as the current value-added measure, is unlikely to ever be sufficiently sophisticated to assess school performance (Wilson, 2003; Gorard, 2006) and therefore school management teams should work with their School Improvement Partner and local education authority (LEA) to set their own 'targets'. At high-achieving schools, such as Park Grove, these school 'targets' should focus on the lowest academic achievers and most disengaged students. For example, 'floor targets' – based on a *minimum quota* – relating to the number of students leaving school with *few or no recognised qualifications* may incentivise more supportive relationships between teachers and the most vulnerable and disadvantaged students.

In this context of 'high-stakes exams', teachers are under pressure to deliver 'improvements' in their 'test scores' and appear to have little time to form positive 'connections' and engage (or re-engage) certain students. However, the ***national curriculum*** may be as much a fundamental problem here as the pre-occupation with individual 'targets', restricting the definition of learning and students' choice of subjects. In other words, schools such as Highbridge may have a much easier job engaging students and promoting a sense of inclusion if the teachers could teach the students in terms of *what is relevant to their lives*. Recent modifications to the national curriculum (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2007) and the creation of new 'diplomas' for 14-19 year-olds (DfES, 2006) aim to promote greater 'flexibility' in schools, recognise a wider range of skills and reduce disengagement. However, ***alternative forms of educational provision – such as studio schools – may be more appropriate for some young people who are 'growing up fast' and cannot 'fit' into the current model of secondary education.*** Although further evidence is needed regarding their feasibility and health promoting effects, studio schools may be an important

alternative to existing secondary schools for some students who can better engage with more flexible, project-based and practical work. Launching this initiative, the Young Foundation (2007 p.1) outlined the following vision in response to the problem of student disengagement in secondary schools:

*Studio Schools will be small schools of around three-hundred students [and could operate in each LEA]. They will teach the national curriculum through interdisciplinary, enterprise-themed projects, but will have a very different style and ethos to most existing schools, with a much stronger emphasis on practical work and enterprise. Every student will have a personal coach; there will be mixed age teams; and the school will have many of the features of a workplace (like booking holidays). Studio schools do not aim to replace other secondary schools – but to complement them by providing an alternative approach suitable for young people looking for a more entrepreneurial option or alienated by traditional pedagogy.*

In addition to current policies and practices relating to 'league tables' and the secondary-school curriculum, the practice of '**streaming**' students into 'sets' also appears to exacerbate school disengagement, unfairly 'label' students at an early age and, in turn, determine the way in which some students form their 'groups' and identities at school. A review of educational policies for the Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE) concluded that: *"there is no consistent and reliable evidence of positive effects of setting and streaming in any subjects, or for pupils of particular ability levels"* (Harlen and Malcolm, 1997 p.40). The constant process of secondary school reorganisation and an increasingly competitive and complex '**admissions**' system may also have had adverse effects of young people's health, particularly where black and other ethnic minority young people from low-income families are 'over-segregated' in unpopular schools with few 'safe' friendships from primary school when they make the transition to secondary school. ***Further theoretically-guided empirical work is needed to examine the effects of 'streaming' and school 'admissions' criteria on students' health-related behaviours, including studies to understand these practices' school 'social network' effects (discussed below).***

A further limitation of the current version of school effectiveness – based on overall levels of attainment – and greater 'competition' between secondary schools is that (1) drugs education is not likely to be prioritised and (2) schools may be forced to 'hide' public health problems, such as students' access to drugs in school.

The young people who participated in this study were generally not the 'drug wise' individuals described by 'normalisation' theorists (Measham et al, 1994; Parker et al, 1998) and the most disengaged and marginalised students appeared to be *learning about drugs through 'doing drugs' and their choices relating to drugs appeared to be influenced by local availability*. In other words, they often adopted a 'pick and mix' approach to drug use (Parker et al, 1998), trying those drugs which are available and then considering the risks and harms later. Despite recent investment in developing and evaluating a 'blueprint' for high-quality,

'evidence-based' drugs education in UK secondary schools (DfES, 2005) it appears uncertain whether schools will prioritise this and implement this widely while drugs education remains non-statutory and while there is no equivalent 'league table' for students' drugs 'literacy'. ***Integrating key messages about the risks and harms associated with drugs such as cannabis, 'pills' and cocaine into the wider secondary school curriculum – for example, in lessons such as science, physical education and English – may be more appropriate.***

***There is also a need for further research and intervention to tackle the supply of drugs in secondary schools and to help students access harm reduction services.***

Interventions which emphasise the *social supply* of cannabis rather than the notion of 'drug dealing' may reduce schools' concerns associated with strategies for reducing students' access to illegal drugs in school (Coomber, 2006; Coomber and Turnbull, 2007).

Furthermore, a system through which schools can refer students to specialist counselling and health-care services and *which does not 'judge' either students or schools* may be appropriate for reducing the harm associated with adolescent drug use and should be piloted to assess its feasibility.

#### ***School-level 'structural' interventions***

The systematic review identified promising examples of 'structural' interventions, evaluated in the USA and Australia, which aimed to modify the school environment to develop a more supportive and positive school 'ethos' and reduced young people's drug use and other health-related behaviours. This evidence suggests that improving school ethos to combat disaffection should be viewed as a highly-promising complement to current curriculum-based interventions to prevent drug use, particularly school-wide interventions which target young people as they enter secondary schools. The studies reviewed suggested that potential ways of doing this are through: school action groups which review and revise policies and practices impacting on ethos and inclusion (Perry et al, 2003; Bond et al, 2004; Flay et al, 2004); conducting in-situ reviews of school needs (Bond et al, 2004); and, through training for teachers in interactive methods and developing better relationships with students (Bond et al, Flay et al, 2004). The case-study research further suggests that 'school ethos' interventions should now be developed which help schools to create a sense of community and belonging, improve the quality of student-teacher relationships and reduce disengagement in order to reduce consequent problems within the domains of health and education. Taken together, this study suggests that if schools don't 'rebuild the village' (Aban Aya), students will do it themselves through 'counter-school' cultures and using other 'resources' available to them. ***School ethos interventions should be piloted across a***



***wider range of settings and rigorously evaluated to explore their effects before being more widely implemented.***

A new school-level 'structural' intervention promoting positive and inclusive school environments – the Healthy School Ethos project – is currently being piloted and evaluated to examine its feasibility and potential for reducing students' substance use in a UK context. The intervention design and components were informed by the studies synthesised in the systematic review (Chapter 4). In particular, 'high-quality' intervention studies suggested that a balance between *pre-specifying* core components (to ensure activities are focused and deliverable) and ensuring the programme is *responsive* to local needs (and doesn't force schools to implement components that are not local priorities) is possible (e.g. the Aban Aya youth project and the Gatehouse project). In addition to four *core components* (see Figure 4, below), schools can also work with an education consultant to develop related, *non-core components* as part of the Healthy School Ethos project (and where *non-core components* are judged to require additional funding schools can bid to a responsive fund to enable delivery). ***However, it is important to caution that the impact of experimental, short-term school-level interventions may be marginal in isolation from more fundamental changes to the policy environment within which schools currently operate*** (discussed above). In other words, 'structural' intervention trials *do not equate to healthy public policies* and school disengagement must also be confronted through joined-up, legislative action. Health impact assessments have become popular as means for assessing the health impacts of policies or programs where health outcomes are *not the main focus* of the programme, such as housing and transport policies (Dannenberg et al, 2008) and they may provide an appropriate framework for assessing the impact of education policies on drug-use outcomes.

In addition, ***further attention urgently needs to be paid to developing interventions which promote school safety***, particularly the way in which 'safe' identities based on cannabis use and other drug-related practices may 'diffuse' through 'rough'/'tough' schools as young people encounter potential dangers and manage 'risk'. 'Blazing' may make sense in an environment where less 'safe' students frequently get 'rushed' and violence is a more immediate threat than drug-related harms. Although the Highbridge school case-study is not representative of *all other potential secondary schools* it is likely to share similarities with other socially and economically disadvantaged inner-city secondary schools. Recent studies critiquing the concept of 'risk' have considered how young people construct their own 'risk hierarchies' (Abbott-Chapman and Denholm, 2001). School-level 'structural' interventions need to address ways in which 'risks' are socially located and unevenly distributed in schools. The evidence provided by the systematic review also suggests that school-level drugs prevention intervention may also need to address types of indirect aggressive



behaviours, such as spreading rumours, and less physical forms of bullying which are more common among girls.

**Figure 4: The Healthy School Ethos project intervention 'core components'**

**(1) Assessing and responding to needs:**

- needs-assessment surveys with students (in Years 8/10) plus 12 interviews and 8 focus groups per school with staff/students to determine priorities for intervention;
- education consultant ensures work responds to measured needs.

**(2) Increasing participation:**

- initiation of a school-wide action group (including senior/other staff, pupils and parents);
- action group work with pupil/parent representatives to review school policies on bullying, substance misuse and teachers' written and verbal feedback on pupils' work;
- increased pupil/parent involvement in other school decision-making bodies.

**(3) Improving relationships:**

- 10 hours' training for 20 teachers per school from specialist consultants on enhancing teacher-pupil communication;
- action group work with pupil representatives to develop and implement agreed rules for appropriate/inappropriate communication and conduct in classrooms;
- identification of one teacher per pupil as the named contact for pastoral care;
- 6 assemblies and 3 other dedicated events aiming to develop positive ethos.

**(4) Recognising achievement:**

- 3 events and 6 displays, plus media work, celebrating pupils' non-academic achievements.

***Further research into the effects of school-level changes to facilitate participation in positive, extra-curricular activities at secondary school on students' drug use should also be a priority.*** The systematic review suggested that opportunities for involvement in 'out-of-hours' activities can improve students' attitudes to school and promote positive relationships and, in turn, protect against drug use. At both Park Grove and Highbridge, students suggested that participation in extra-curricular activities could promote positive relationships with teachers and 'mentors'. Furthermore, at Highbridge School, these activities appeared to have the potential to promote *integration* and to be a 'resource' through which students could construct 'safe' and 'sweet' identities. The process of 'extending' schools (DfES, 2006) should involve students – particularly focussing on the views of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable young people – when planning and delivering programmes of 'out-of-hours' activities.

Finally, it should also be noted that while schools (and school-level changes) may be able to mute inequality and reduce harm they also partly reflect and reproduce it and therefore ***school-level socio-environmental changes should ideally be accompanied by policy-level changes to reduce poverty and other social-structural interventions to support children, young people and their families.*** For example, young people's 'scripts' for substance use are often based on 'street-practices' such as 'blazing' which may be social and cultural 'expressions' of poverty and social exclusion.



Social networks are *active – but structured* – social arrangements within which young people can form distinct identities and stay 'safe'. The case-study research exemplified how young people build their friendship 'groups' as they move through secondary school, how this process is influenced by young people's experiences and 'position' at school, and how young people's attitudes and behaviours in relation to *both* school and education *and* drug use and other health-related behaviours are influenced by these friendships and their developing sense of identity. Young people's use or rejection of substances such as cannabis appears to be a particularly important element in how many school friendship groups identify themselves. School social networks appear to be the key 'mediator' between school-level socio-environment factors and students' drug use. ***Further theory-guided research is therefore urgently needed to examine how schools' policies and practices – such as those relating to admissions, assessment, streaming, discipline and extra-curricular activities – can influence the size, shape, identity and other characteristics of students' social networks and their effect on young people's health-related behaviours.***

However at present, despite gaining increasing attention both in the UK and internationally, social network analysis is in its infancy in the field of adolescent health research with relatively few studies being carried out in this area which go beyond using social networks as a *metaphor* (Cotterell, 2007). Furthermore, previous research on young people's drug use has conceived young people as passive recipients of 'social capital', and low social capital as a static, somewhat abstract determinant of substance use (Lindstrom, 2004; Lundborg, 2005) yet it may be necessary to *invert* this formulation of 'social capital' and instead explore whether, and how, substance use functions in the building and maintenance of friendship capital. The case-study research illustrates how young people's 'groups' and 'crews' are not pre-determined sources of differentiation but rather the active product of school and other social structures. In that sense, education and other public policies partially determine young people's social networks and, in turn, and network effects on young people's attitudes and actions.

Building on this doctoral research, I have been awarded a MRC post-doctoral *Health of the Public Fellowship* to undertake a three-year, multi-component study examining young people's social networks, and how these relate to young people's drug use and other health-related behaviours. The study will test hypotheses, develop new theoretical insights and, ultimately, provide a more comprehensive understanding of how young people's social networks develop at school and influence health-related behaviours. This research is comprised of three sub-projects: (1) a systematic review to appraise and synthesize the existing evidence relating to young people's social networks and all the key adolescent



health behaviours (substance use, sexual behaviour, physical activity, diet); (2) secondary analyses of school-level socio-metric data from the Teenage Health in Schools (*THiS*) survey to identify cross-sectional associations and test hypotheses regarding school-level influences on young people's social networks and adolescent health behaviours (substance use and physical activity); and (3) group interviews with young people to explore the plausibility of school social network effects on health and further processes through which school social network effects may occur. The aim of this project is, again, to identify scope for policy-level and school-level interventions for promoting adolescent health, and further research priorities.

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# Appendix 1: Young people's and teachers' socio-demographic characteristics

## Young people's socio-demographic characteristics

Name (pseudonym)	Gender (M/F)	Age at first interview	Ethnicity	Anyone work at home (Y/N)	Housing tenure
Park Grove School					
AJ	M	14	Dual heritage (white British-Chinese)	Y	Rented
Carl*	M	14	White British	N	Rented
Danny	M	14	White British	Y	Not known
Duke*	M	14	Black African	Y	Rented
Holly*	F	14	White British	Y	Owner-occupied
Jaz*	F	15	White British	Y	Rented
Jerome*	M	15	Dual heritage (white-black British)	Y	Rented
Josh	M	14	Dual heritage (white British-Turkish)	Y	Owner-occupied
Kieran*	M	15	Black African	Y	Owner-occupied
Kimberley	F	15	Black Caribbean	Y	Owner-occupied
Mary-Ann	F	14	White British	Y	Rented



<b>Mel*</b>	F	14		Dual heritage (white-black Caribbean)	Y		Not known
<b>Nadine*</b>	F	14		White British	N		Rented
<b>Ruby*</b>	F	14		White British	N		Rented
<b>Sonia*</b>	F	14		White Irish	N		Rented
<b>Highbridge School</b>							
<b>Amelia*</b>	F	15		Dual heritage (white-black British)	Y		Rented
<b>Donna*</b>	F	15		White British	N		Rented
<b>Deniz</b>	M	14		Turkish	Y		Rented
<b>Fernando</b>	M	14		Hispanic	Y		Rented
<b>Hamit</b>	M	14		Turkish	N		Rented
<b>Jason</b>	M	14		Black African	Y		Owner occupied
<b>Jay*</b>	M	15		Black Caribbean	N		Rented
<b>Jermaine*</b>	M	14		Black Caribbean	Y		Owner occupied
<b>Kyle*</b>	M	15		Black Caribbean	N		Rented
<b>Leanne*</b>	F	14		Black British	N		Rented
<b>Michelle*</b>	F	14		Dual heritage (white-black British)	N		Rented



Rosie*	F	14		Dual heritage (white-black British)	N	Not known
Roxy*	F	14		Black British	Y	Rented
Sabrina	F	15		Black Caribbean	N	Rented

\*Students who were selected because they were considered to be ‘disengaged’ from school

Teachers’ socio-demographic characteristics

Position	Gender (M/F)
Park Grove School	
Deputy Head	M
Head of Department	M
Head of Year 10	F
Teacher (5+ years experience)	M
Newly-qualified teacher (NQT)	F

Position	Gender (M/F)
Highbridge School	
Head Teacher	M
Head of Faculty	F
Head of Year 10	F
Teacher (5+ years experience)	M
Newly-qualified teacher (NQT)	M



INTRODUCTION

Thanks for agreeing to meet me. My name is Adam. I am a researcher at the University of London.

My research is about young people’s experiences at school and their attitudes and choices about drinking and drugs. I am interviewing students in Year 10.

If it’s ok with you I’d like to interview you – once now and once again in the summer term. Each interview should take about 45-60 minutes. Everything we talk about will be **confidential. You will not be identified at any point and what you say will be private.** Also, if you don’t want to answer a particular question, you don’t have to and if you feel uncomfortable or find it difficult to talk about things **we can stop the interview at any point.**

Do you agree to take part?

Have you got any questions before we start?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 1      How old are you? How would you describe your ethnic background?
- 2      Have you been at this school since Year 7? If **NO**, find out about changes of school.
- 3      Who do you live with at the moment? Can you tell me a bit about what [*who you live with*] do? Are your parents in work? What do they do? Do they own your house or is it rented?
- 4      What area do you live in (not your address)? How would you describe your area? Do most people of your age who live in your area go to this school?

## SCHOOL EXPERIENCES & VIEWS ABOUT SCHOOL

I am really interested in what you think about school and whether you enjoy and feel part of your school. The following questions will look at this issue in more depth:

Question	Additional probes
<b>What makes a school good or bad?</b>	<p>What do you like about school?</p> <p>What don't you like about school?</p> <p>Is this a good school?</p> <p>What did you think about it when you first arrived? Describe what it looked liked/felt like?</p> <p>How is secondary school different to primary school?</p> <p>Do you feel like you're a part of the school?</p>
<b>Who are your friends in school? Can you tell me a bit about them?</b>	<p>How many?</p> <p>What ages?</p> <p>Boys or girls?</p> <p>Like you or different?</p> <p>In same classes?</p> <p>How long have you been friends?</p> <p>Why do you think you are friends?</p> <p>Are these the same people you hang about with outside school?</p>
<b>Do you think students generally get on well with each other at [name] school?</b>	<p>Do you think they feel safe at school?</p> <p>Do you think they are happy?</p> <p>Have you encountered or heard about any incidents of bullying or violence? Where?</p>
<b>Do you get on well with most of your teachers?</b>	<p>How many would you say you get on well with?</p> <p>What sorts of teacher do you like?</p> <p>What sorts of teacher don't you like?</p> <p>Do teachers treat you with respect?</p> <p>Do they treat you like a child or like an adult?</p> <p>Do they listen to what you say?</p> <p>Do teachers care how students do in your school? If so, why do you think they do?</p> <p>Do you get on well with other staff?</p>



How do you think your teachers would describe you?	<p>Would they say you work hard?</p> <p>What do you think your teachers think about you and your friends?</p>
Do you find school-work interesting?	<p>What subjects do you like/not like? Why/why not?</p> <p>Do teachers recognise when you do well? How do they react?</p>
Do your parents care about how well you do at school?	<p>Do your parents talk to you about school?</p> <p>What do your parents think about your teachers?</p> <p>What do your parents say to you about what you will do when you leave school?</p>
What do you normally do at break-times and after school?	<p>Are you involved in any extra-curricular activities at school (e.g. sports, clubs, etc.)?</p> <p>How do you get home?</p> <p>What do you do after school?</p>
Do you ever not go to school?	<p>Why? What do you do when you don't go to school?</p> <p>Do your friends do the same or not?</p>
What do you think about the rules at your school?	<p>What rules do you agree with, what don't you agree with?</p> <p>Are they fair? Too strict? Not strict enough? Is everyone treated equally?</p> <p>What's the head like?</p> <p>Have you ever talked to the head?</p> <p>What sort of school do you think the head wants to have?</p> <p>Do you think students have much of a say at [name] school?</p> <p>How could the school be made better?</p>
What are your thoughts about life after school?	<p>What do teachers say about how well you will do?</p> <p>What grades/qualifications do you expect to get when you leave?</p> <p>What do you want to do when you leave school?</p> <p>Tell me what becoming an adult means to you? What's good about it? What's bad about it? Excited? Scared?</p> <p>Do you think you will get a home of your own? Why/why not?</p> <p>Will you get married? Have kids?</p>

## ATTITUDES & CHOICES REALTED TO HEALTH

I'm also interested your attitudes and choices about health behaviours, such as, smoking, drinking and drugs. Please remember that your answers be kept private. ***No-one will find out what you say.***

Question	Additional probes
Have you ever tried smoking?	<p>When? Where?</p> <p>Why ?</p> <p>Who with (how old were they)? Where did you get cigarettes from?</p>
Do you smoke regularly at the moment?	<p>How often?</p> <p>Who with (how old are they)? Where do you get cigarettes from?</p> <p>What would your parents/teachers think about you smoking? Have you told them? How did they react?</p>
<p>What sorts of young people at your school smoke?</p> <p>What sorts of young people at your school don't smoke?</p>	<p>What does it say about them?</p> <p><i>Anything in common in terms of....</i></p> <p>... attitudes to school and school work?</p> <p>... behaviour at school?</p> <p>... whether teachers like them?</p> <p>... whether they are ambitious?</p> <p>... boys or girls?</p> <p>What are the main reasons why people at your school smoke?</p>
Have you ever drunk alcohol?	<p>What sorts of drink?</p> <p>When? How often? Where did you drink?</p> <p>Who with (how old were they)? Where did you get it from?</p> <p>What would your parents/teachers think about you drinking? Have you told them? How did they react?</p> <p>What is the right age to start drinking? Why?</p>
Have you ever been drunk?	<p>Can you tell me a bit more about the last time you were drunk?</p> <p><i>When? Where? Who with? How did you get drunk? Did you enjoy it or not? Did your friends know? What did they think?</i></p> <p>Are you worried about any effects on your health?</p>



<p><b>What sorts of young people at your school like to drink?</b></p> <p><b>What sorts of young people at your school don't like to drink?</b></p>	<p>What does it say about them?</p> <p><i>Anything in common in terms of....</i></p> <p>... attitudes to school and school work?</p> <p>... behaviour at school?</p> <p>... whether teachers like them?</p> <p>... whether they are ambitious?</p> <p>... boys or girls?</p> <p>What are the main reasons why people at your school drink?</p>
<p><b>Have you ever taken any illegal drugs or sniffed solvents?</b></p>	<p>What drugs?</p> <p>When? Where? Who with?</p> <p>Where do you get the drugs from?</p> <p>What did you think of it?</p> <p>Did your friends know? What did they think about it?</p> <p>What would your parents say?</p> <p>Are you worried about the effects of these drugs on your health?</p> <p>Are you worried about doing something that is against the law?</p> <p>Do you think taking drugs is harming your prospects for the future?</p> <p>Does this matter?</p>
<p><b>What sorts of young people at your school like take drugs?</b></p> <p><b>What sorts of young people at your school don't take drugs?</b></p>	<p>What does it say about them?</p> <p><i>Anything common in terms of....</i></p> <p>... attitudes to school and school work?</p> <p>... behaviour at school?</p> <p>... whether teachers like them?</p> <p>... whether they are ambitious?</p> <p>... girls or boys?</p> <p>What are the main reasons why people at your school take drugs?</p>
<p><b><i>Do you think young people at some schools smoke, drink or take drugs more than others?</i></b></p>	<p><i>Does this reflect...</i></p> <p>... attitudes to school and school work?</p> <p>... their friends?</p>

	<p>... whether teachers like them?</p> <p>... something else about the differences between these schools?</p> <p>... whether they are ambitious?</p> <p>... anything else about some schools?</p>
<p><b><i>What are the rules about smoking, drinking and drugs at your school</i></b></p>	<p>What happens if you get caught on the premises?</p> <p>Do you reckon teachers know whether students smoke/drink/take drugs? What do you think they think about it?</p> <p>Is there any support for students to stop smoking or for students with drink or drug problems?</p>

***Is there anything else you've thought about during this interview that you would like to talk about before we finish?***

Thank you.

Take care & hopefully see you again later in the school year!



INTRODUCTION

Thanks for agreeing to meet me again. I've some more questions about school and what you do outside school. I am also following up some of the things we talked about last time to see if your views have changed at all.

If it's ok with you I'd like to interview you again. This interview should take about 45-60 minutes again. As before, everything we talk about will be **confidential**. **You will not be identified at any point and what you say will be private**. Also, if you don't want to answer a particular question, you don't have to and if you feel uncomfortable or find it difficult to talk about things **we can stop the interview at any point**.

Do you agree to take part?

Have you got any questions before we start?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION	
1	How old are you now?
2	Has where you live or who you live with changed since I last interviewed you? Is someone at home working at the moment?
3	How would you describe your social class? Why? What social class are most of your friends? What social class are most other people at this school? [If they don't understand what social class is, say 'socioeconomic status' or ask them if they're working class or middle class etc.]

SCHOOL & PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

I am really interested in how things have been going at school and what you think about school, and life after school, at the moment. The following questions will look at these issues in more depth:

Question	Additional probes
How have things been going at school since I last interviewed you?	<p><i>Pick up on their stories from last time...</i></p> <p>What do you like about school at the moment? What don't you like about school at the moment?</p> <p>Do you get on well with most of your teachers at the moment? What sorts of teacher do you like? What sorts of teacher don't you like?</p> <p>Do you feel safe at school?</p> <p>Do you feel like you're a part of the school at the moment?</p> <p>What sort of marks have you been getting recently? What 'sets' are you in at the moment? Is your attendance good?</p> <p>How has your school changed over time? How does the way you feel about it change?</p> <p>What is the point of school for you <i>Probe how they 'use' school.</i></p> <p>What do you think other people think of you? Do you care? What is your most memorable moment at this school? <i>Probe their identity, regrets, etc.</i></p>
Who are your friends in school at the moment? Have they stayed the same this Year.	<p>How would you describe your group of friends at the moment? What is your group called by you/other students/teachers?</p> <p>Have you changed as a group since Yr 7?</p> <p>As a group, how are you different from other people? <i>How are you different in terms of ...</i> ... your attitudes to school and school work? ... your behaviour at school? ... how ambitious you are? ... interests? ... where you live?</p> <p>What would you say the main groups of people are in your Year? What 'spaces' do they go to in school?</p> <p><i>How are they divided? Probe re:</i> ... what they are like at school?</p>



	<p>... their ethnicity?  ... their social class?  ... where they live?  ... their interests?  Tell me how groups of people change – have the groups changed, or the people in them?</p> <p>Do boys and girls get on well here?</p> <p>Is it important to know lots of people at school or not? Why? How many do you know?</p>
How would you describe the school culture this Year?	<p>What sort of things does the head value most? What sort of things do the other teachers value most?</p> <p>Is it a competitive place? Is there much support?</p> <p>Do have contact with any school staff other than teachers at the moment, such as learning mentors?</p> <p>What are the rules like?</p> <p>What is there to do here outside lessons? Any sports, clubs, etc at school that you're involved with at the moment?</p>
What do you hope to get in your GCSEs next year?	<p>What grades/qualifications do you expect to get when you leave?</p> <p>What subjects do you like/not like? Why?</p> <p>Are you looking forward to Yr 11?</p> <p>What do the teachers say to you about how well you're going to do?</p> <p>Do they recognise when you do well?</p> <p>Do your parents care about how well do you?</p>
What are your thoughts and plans about life after school?	<p>Where will you be in 2-3 years time? Where will you be in 5 years time?</p> <p><i>Questions about:</i>  ... education, training &amp; work  ... housing  ... friends  ... relationships &amp; marriage  ... pregnancy &amp; children</p> <p>If clear plans, why have you made that choice?</p> <p>Do you get any careers advice at school? Have you done any work experience at school?</p>

## YOUNG PEOPLE'S HEALTH AND SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

I'm also interested in what you do outside school at the moment and particularly your choices about smoking, drinking and drugs. Please remember that your answers will be kept **private**. *No-one will find out what you say.*

Question	Additional probes
<b>Are your friends still the same outside school?</b>	<p>How do you choose friends out of school at the moment?</p> <p>Do you have a boyfriend/girlfriend?</p> <p>How much time do you spend at home compared to with your friends?</p> <p><i>What do you normally do ...</i>  ... after school?  ... at the weekends?  ... in the school holidays?</p>
<b>Do you smoke?</b>	<p>How often? When? Where? Who with? Why?  What would stop you smoking?</p> <p>Do you ever think what it says about you if you do/don't smoke? <i>Explore</i></p> <p>What are the reasons you started smoking/stopped/haven't started smoking?</p> <p>Does who you are friends with affect your choices about smoking? Why?</p>
<b>When was the last time you drank alcohol?</b>	<p>What sorts of drink? When? Where? Who with? Why?</p> <p>Do you ever think what its say about you if you drink? <i>Probe the links between brand identity and social identity.</i></p> <p>What is the right age to start drinking do you think? Why?</p> <p>Does who you are friends with affect your choices about drinking? Why?</p>
<b>Have you got drunk recently?</b>	<p>When? Where? Who with? How did you get drunk? Are you worried about your health?</p> <p>How would you define being 'drunk'? What does 'binge' drinking mean to you?</p> <p>Did you enjoy it or not? Did your friends or parents know? What did they think about it?</p> <p>What does getting drunk it says about you? Does it make you look 'good' or 'bad'?</p>



<p><b>Are you still smoking cannabis?</b></p> <p><b>OR</b></p> <p><b>Have you tried smoking cannabis (again) since I last interviewed you?</b></p>	<p>When? Where? Who with? Why?</p> <p>Where can you get the cannabis from?</p> <p>What did you think of it?</p> <p>What does it say about you? Can drugs be symbolic?</p> <p>Did your friends know? What did they think about it? Does who you are friends with affect your choices about drinking? Why?</p> <p>Do your parents know?</p> <p>Are you worried about any possible effects on your health?</p> <p>Are you worried about doing something that might be against the law?</p> <p>Do you think smoking cannabis is harming your prospects for the future? Does this matter?</p>
<p><b>Have you tried any other drugs recently?</b></p>	<p>What? When? Where? Who with?</p> <p>Where do you get the drugs from?</p> <p>What did you think of it?</p> <p>Do you ever think what it says about you?</p> <p>Did your friends know? What did they think about it?</p> <p>What would your parents say?</p> <p>Are you worried about the effects on your health?</p> <p>Are you worried about doing something that is against the law?</p> <p>What do certain drugs say about people? <i>Probe specific drugs see what they think these mean in terms of people's identity.</i></p>
<p><b>Which drugs do you think are most harmful?</b></p>	<p>Why?</p> <p>What do you think of A,B,C categories for drugs? Do you know what they are?</p> <p>Why do you think drug use is quite high among young people you age in London? Why? What should be done?</p>

***What have you thought of these interviews? How does it feel to talk about these things?***

***Is there anything else you've thought about during this interview that you would like to talk about before we finish?***

Thank you so much for your time this and all the best for the future.



INTRODUCTION

Thanks for agreeing to meet me. My name is Adam Fletcher. I am a researcher at the University of London.

My research is about young people's experiences at school and their attitudes and choices about drinking and drugs.

If it's ok with you I'd like to interview you. The interview should take about 45-60 minutes. Everything we talk about will be **confidential. You will not be identified at any point and what you say will be private.** Also, if you don't want to answer a particular question, you don't have to and if you feel uncomfortable or find it difficult to talk about things **we can stop the interview at any point.**

Do you agree to take part?

Have you got any questions before we start?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION	
1	How long have you worked at this school? Have you taught at other schools previously?
2	What do you teach? Do you have other responsibilities?

## SCHOOL EXPERIENCES & VIEWS ABOUT SCHOOL

I am really interested in young people's experiences of secondary school, particularly in Years 10 and 11. The following questions will look at this issue in more depth:

Question	Additional probes
<b>How would you describe this school?</b>	<p>Compare it to other schools you've worked at. What is good about this school? What could be improved?</p> <p>How is this school rated in terms of Ofsted reports, SATS scores and GCSE results?</p> <p>How has your school changed over time?</p> <p>What are the priorities of the head/senior management team at the moment? Why?</p> <p>How much does the head and management prioritise inclusion?</p> <p>What do the parents say about the school?</p> <p>Are the rules strict?</p> <p>Do the students get on well with teachers? <i>Further questions: who? why?</i></p> <p>What is the attendance like?</p> <p>Are many students excluded?</p> <p>How safe is the school?</p> <p>Who has a say in how the school is run?</p>
<b>In Years 10 and 11, how would you describe the students here?</b>	<p>Do they get on well?</p> <p>How are they divided? <i>Probe 'groups' re:</i>  ... their academic achievement?  ... how they act in school?  ... their ethnicity?  ... their social class?  ... where they live?  ... their interests?</p> <p>How do these groups change as students go through school?</p> <p>How well do you get on with different groups of students? Why?</p> <p>How well are these different groups served by the school?</p> <p>Does the 'point' of school differ for different 'groups'?</p>
<b>What do the students usually go onto after they have left school?</b>	<p>What grades/qualifications do you expect most of them to get at 16/18?</p> <p>Who ends up where?</p>



## YOUNG PEOPLE'S HEALTH AND SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

I'm also interested in what students do outside school at the moment and particularly their choices about smoking, drinking and drugs. Please remember that your answers will be kept confidential.

Question	Additional probes
Is there health education at this school?	Who teaches this? How often?  What's it about?  Do you think this is useful?
What are the rules about smoking, drinking and drugs at your school	What happens if pupils get caught on the premises? Can you give me an example?  Is there any support for students to stop smoking or for students with drink or drug problems?
Do you know which students smoke?  What sorts of young people at your school smoke?  What sorts of young people at your school don't smoke?	What does it say about them?  <i>Anything in common in terms of....</i>  ... attitudes to school and school work?  ... academic achievement?  ... behaviour at school?  ... whether they get on with teachers?  ... whether they are ambitious?  ... boys or girls?  Why do you think those that smoke do so?  How do they get involved in smoking?
What sorts of young people at your school do you think like to drink/get drunk?  What sorts of young people at your school do you think don't drink?	What does it say about them?  <i>Anything in common in terms of....</i>  ... attitudes to school and school work?  ... academic achievement?  ... behaviour at school?  ... whether teachers like them?  ... whether they are ambitious?  ... boys or girls?  Why do you think those that drink do so?  How do they get involved in drinking?

<p><b>What sorts of young people at your school do you think use drugs?</b></p> <p><b>What sorts of young people at your school do you think don't use drugs?</b></p>	<p>Which drugs?</p> <p>What does it say about them?</p> <p><i>Anything in common in terms of....</i></p> <p>... attitudes to school and school work?</p> <p>... academic achievement?</p> <p>... behaviour at school?</p> <p>... whether teachers like them?</p> <p>... whether they are ambitious?</p> <p>... girls or boys?</p> <p>... ethnicity?</p> <p>Why do you think those that use drugs do so?</p> <p>How do they get involved in drugs?</p> <p>What do you do if you suspect students are using drugs?</p>
<p><b>Could the school do more to prevent drug use? Should it do more?</b></p>	<p>What are their views on current policies relating to drugs prevention and/or harm reduction?</p>

***Is there anything else you've thought about during this interview that you would like to talk about before we finish?***

Thank you.



## Information for young people

### ***Why is this research being carried out?***

The aim of this research is to understand how young people's experiences during secondary school relate to their health behaviours, such as drinking and drug use. The research will be used to help to develop new approaches for promoting young people's health.

### ***What are you being asked to do?***

This research project will take place at your school during the 2006-2007 school year. As part of this project, **I would like to interview you twice** (once in the autumn term and once in the summer term). **Each interview should take between 45-60 minutes.**

### ***What is the interview about?***

There will be questions about **you and your views**. There are no 'right' and 'wrong' answers. I am interested in your experiences and ideas.

### ***Who is carrying out these interviews?***

My name is Adam Fletcher and I am a researcher in the Department of Public Health and Policy at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, which is part of the University of London.

### ***Do I have to take part?***

You do not have to take part if you not want to. If you take part but don't want to answer a question, you don't have to. If you take part in one interview you don't have to take part in the second one if you do not want to.

### ***Will anyone find out what I say?***

Everything you say will be completely **PRIVATE** and will only be read by researchers and not by anyone else. You will not be named or otherwise identified at any point. If issues of child protection come up we will discuss how we can let a member of staff at your school know about these issues.







Identification No. \_\_\_\_\_

### Consent Form

	Yes	No
1. Have you read and understood the 'Information for young people' sheet attached to this form?		
2. Have you asked about anything else you want to know before you decide to be interviewed?		
3. Do you understand that your interview will be PRIVATE?		
4. Do you understand that you do not have to take part?		
5. Do you want to be interviewed?		

If ALL your answers are YES then please sign your name below.

If you do not want to take part in this study then thank you for taking the time to read the information.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature                                      Name                                      Date

This page will be kept *separately from the recording of your interview.*

Your answers will be *PRIVATE* and will be used for research only.

If issues of child protection come upon we can discuss how you could let school staff know about these issues

#### Permission to quote what you say

All quotes will be anonymous so you cannot be identified. Is it OK to quote you in your exact own words about your experiences and ideas? YES/NO



## Information for teachers

### *Why is this research being carried out?*

The aim of this research is to understand how young people's experiences during secondary school relate to their health behaviours, such as drinking and drug use. The research will be used to help to develop new approaches for promoting young people's health.

### *What are you being asked to do?*

As part of this research project, I would like to interview. **The interview should take between 45 and 60 minutes.**

### *What will be discussed?*

There will be questions about **your experiences working with young people and your views and ideas.**

### *Who is carrying out this research?*

My name is Adam Fletcher and I am a doctoral researcher in the Department of Public Health and Policy at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, which is part of the University of London.

### *Do I have to take part?*

You do not have to take part if you don't want to.

### *Will anyone find out what I say?*

Everything you say will be completely **PRIVATE** and will only be read by researchers and not by anyone else. You and your school will not be named or otherwise identified at any point.







Identification No. \_\_\_\_\_

### Consent Form

	Yes	No
1. Have you read and understood the 'Information for teachers' sheet attached to this form?		
2. Have you asked about anything else you want to know before you decide to take part?		
3. Do you want to take part?		

*If **ALL** your answers are **YES** then please sign your name below.*

*If you do not want to take part in this study then thank you for taking the time to read the information.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*Your answers will be **PRIVATE** and will be used for research only.*

#### Permission to *quote* what you say

All quotes will be anonymous so you cannot be identified. Is it OK to quote you in your exact own words about your experiences and ideas? YES/NO



**London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine  
University of London**

Keppel Street, London, WC1E 7HT



**Department of Public Health & Policy  
Public & Environmental Health Research Unit**

**September 2006**

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am based at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine undertaking research on young people's health and behaviour. I would like to ask your son/daughter if they would like to take part in this study.

The attached sheet gives more information about the research.

**If you are happy for us to ask your son/daughter if they want to take part, you do not need to do anything.**

**If you do *NOT* want your son/daughter to take part in the research, please contact Adam Fletcher as soon as possible (see below).**

**If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me on 020 7958 8312 or email me at [adam.fletcher@lshtm.ac.uk](mailto:adam.fletcher@lshtm.ac.uk)**

Yours sincerely,

**Adam Fletcher**  
Research Student



***Why is this research being carried out?***

The aim of this research is to understand how young people's experiences during secondary school relate to their health and behaviour. The research will be used to help to develop new approaches for promoting young people's health.

***What will your son/daughter be asked to do?***

This research project will take place at your child's school during the 2006-2007 school year. As part of this project, I would like to interview some students at the school. I hope to interview these students twice (once in the autumn term and once in the summer term), each interview should take between 45 and 60 minutes.

***What is the interview about?***

There will be questions about **them and their views**. For example, there are questions about secondary school, their friends, future plans and health issues, such as their attitudes to alcohol and drugs. There are no 'right' and 'wrong' answers. I am interested in their experiences and ideas.

***Will anyone find out what they say?***

Everything they say will be completely **PRIVATE** and only read by researchers and not by anyone else. Young people will not be named or otherwise identified at any point.

***Do they have to take part?***

Your son/daughter does **not** have to take part if he/she does not want to.

**If you are happy for your son/daughter to take part if they choose to, you do not have to return this slip.**

**If you do *NOT* want them to take part in this study, please fill in and return the form below using the enclosed envelope (it does not need a stamp)**

If you have any questions contact Adam Fletcher (Tel: 020 7958 8311; email: [adam.fletcher@lshtm.ac.uk](mailto:adam.fletcher@lshtm.ac.uk)).

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I **do not** want my son/daughter to take part in this study.

Name of son/daughter \_\_\_\_\_

Name of their school \_\_\_\_\_

Your signature \_\_\_\_\_ Your name \_\_\_\_\_

**Return to: Adam Fletcher, Department of Public Health and Policy,  
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Keppel Street, London,  
WC1E 7HT**